10¢

THE SKIPPER

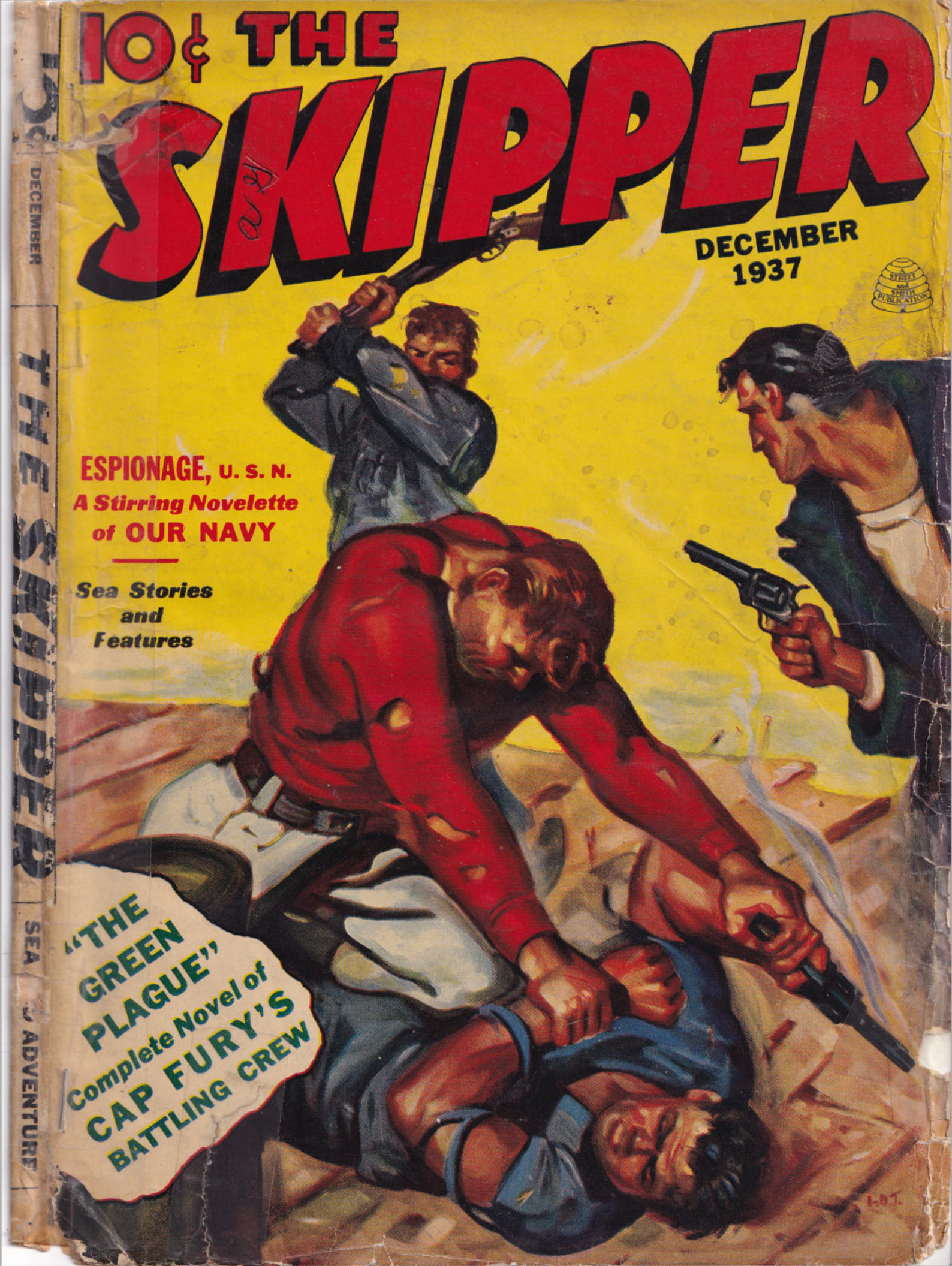
DECEMBER 1937

STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

ESPIONAGE, U. S. N.
A Stirring Novelette of **OUR NAVY**

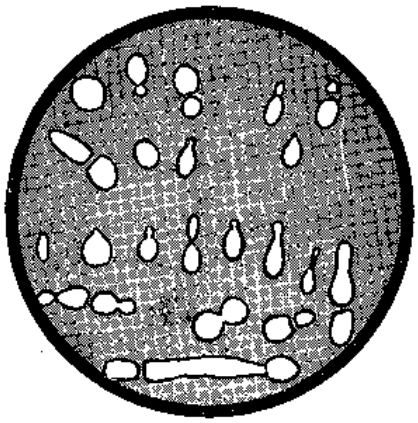
Sea Stories and Features

"THE GREEN PLAGUE"
Complete Novel of
CAP FURY'S BATTLING CREW



10¢ DECEMBER THE SKIPPER SEA ADVENTURE

This is the stubborn germ you must kill if you want



REAL RELIEF FROM DANDRUFF

Discovery that Strange Bottle-Shaped Germ Causes Dandruff Leads to New Kind of Therapy, Antiseptic in Character. Listerine Treatment Brings Quick Relief to 76% of Patients in New Jersey Dandruff Clinic. Thousands Report Remarkable Results

Pityrosporum ovale

The germ which causes dandruff, magnified many times. In cases of dandruff it is always present on the scalp and hair and in dandruff scales.

IF you have any evidence of dandruff, don't waste time on untried ointments, salves or solutions that merely strike at symptoms and relieve only temporarily.

Use the new treatment that really gets at the cause . . . the only treatment so far as we know that has proved itself repeatedly in laboratory and clinic . . . the treatment that is getting results for countless people who try it . . . Listerine Antiseptic once or twice a day, accompanied by massage.

Listerine surrounds the hair and scalp and penetrates infected hair follicles, and *kills the germ Pityrosporum ovale, which, research now shows, causes dandruff.*

See Improvement at Once

After the first few treatments you will notice how Listerine Antiseptic diminishes the number of unsightly crusts and scales. How it allays irritating itch and burning which so often accompany a dandruff condition. How it cleanses and freshens the scalp so that it feels lively and youthful. How it brings new vigor to the hair, itself.

For your own satisfaction, examine Listerine's brilliant results in the most searching clinical study of dandruff undertaken in years.

Curing Rabbits of Dandruff

Rabbits given dandruff by inoculation of Pityrosporum ovale were treated on one side, only, with Listerine Antiseptic once a day. The other side was untreated.

Within four days improvement was noted, and at the end of fourteen days, on the average, a complete cure was effected. No scales, no crusts. The sides not treated with Listerine showed evidence of dandruff nearly a month later.

Relief in Two Weeks

In a noted midwestern skin clinic, men and women dandruff patients were chosen for the Listerine treatment. A majority were instructed to massage the scalp *once a day* with Listerine Antiseptic. The rest of the group used a non-antiseptic solution. We ask you to carefully note the convincing results again achieved:

A substantial number of the users of Listerine Antiseptic obtained marked relief in the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases, scalps were found to be clear and free of dandruff in from three to eight weeks—itching stopped, dandruff scales were eliminated, and in some cases falling hair was terminated. *Virtually none of the persons using a non-antiseptic solution showed any improvement.*

76% Got Relief

Meanwhile in a New Jersey clinic, other dermatologists were cross-checking the results of the midwestern clinic. Fifty men and women, all with definitely established cases of dandruff, were undergoing treatment twice a day with Listerine Antiseptic. At the end of three weeks, 76% showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff, i.e., itching, scaling. Only three failed to respond to the Listerine treatment, possibly due, as a research report suggests, to irregularity in applying the treatment.

Keep it Up

If you have the slightest evidence of dandruff, start now with Listerine and massage, once a day at least. Twice a day is better. Caution: Don't expect overnight miracles. Remember, dandruff is a germ disease, requiring persistent and systematic treatment, which *should be antiseptic.* Remember, also, that Listerine's results against dandruff are a matter of laboratory and clinical record.

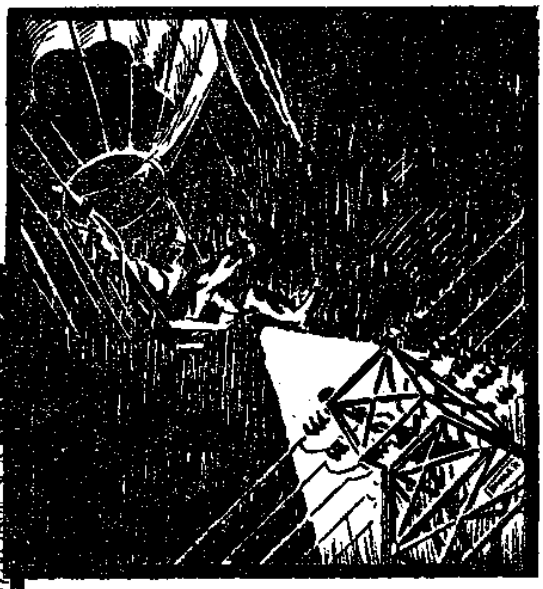
LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY
St. Louis, Mo.

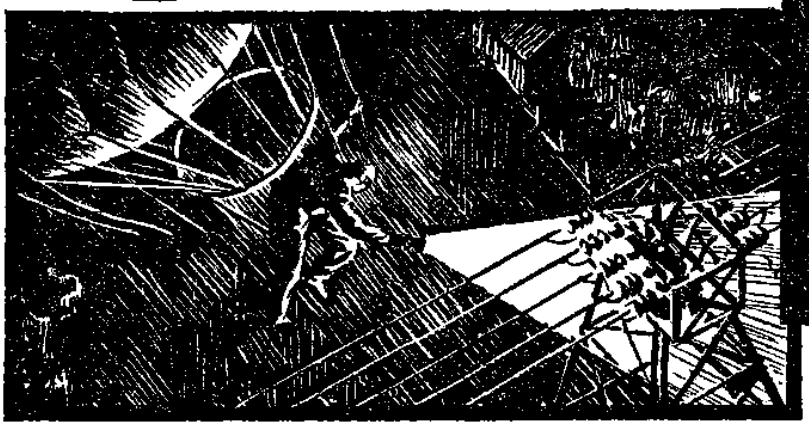
LISTERINE GETS RESULTS

2 for 25¢

Death Waited While He Hovered in the Sky!

Crowd Waits Electrocution As Falling Balloon Wafts toward Wires





"I never did like jumping from balloons," writes G. W. de Grange, professional daredevil of Martinsburg, West Virginia, "and this time there was a mean wind to make matters worse.

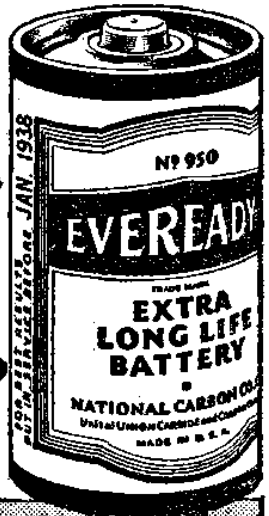
"We finally got the hot air bag filled, and I took off in the dark from the fair grounds at Emmitsburg, Md., intending to make a parachute jump into the town square.

"But the balloon was soggy. She wouldn't give me altitude. I passed about 300 feet over the treetops of the town square, and didn't dare to jump... and then the big bag began to slowly settle.

"I ripped my 'Eveready' flashlight from its straps on my 'chute harness and snapped it on to see what was below me. To my horror, the balloon was going to set me none too gently down in a nest of hot, high-tension wires!

"I've sideslipped by these death-dealing wires with a 'chute many a time . . . but just imagine steering a lollopy big dying balloon by pulling on the shrouds. But I pulled with everything I had while the crowd waited for an aerial execution... and because those faithful, fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries were on the job, and showed me the wires in time, I slid by certain death by *inches!* Without light *the instant I needed it*, that crowd would have got more than its money's worth. (*Signed*)

George W. de Grange



"EVEREADY" BATTERIES ARE *FRESH* BATTERIES

The DATE-LINE guarantees FRESHNESS

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THERE IS WATER IN FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES, ISN'T THERE MR. GRAY?
NOT "WATER", SON, BUT A FRESH BATTERY HAS ABOUT 4 TEASPOONFULS OF LIQUID...THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT WORK.
AND THAT'S WHY YOU WANT FRESH DATED "EVEREADY" BATTERIES ...A DRIED-OUT BATTERY DOESN'T LAST LONG, AND THIS DATE-LINE GUARANTEES FRESHNESS

VOL. II
No. 6

THE SKIPPER

Dec.
1937

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ALAN N. GROSSMAN

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YOU CAN GET a Boy's or a Girl's Model Bicycle like this or big cash commission for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with art picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog and plan book. Many other premium offers in catalog. Our 42nd Year. We are fair and square! — Sell one or more boxes of CLOVERINE SALVE in most every home. Old Cloverine Agents order now. SEND NO MONEY!—We trust you. Be First! Begin now. MAIL COUPON BELOW.

Balloon Tires

Headlight; Horn; Tool Box; Coaster Brake. Yes, fully equipped. Chromium parts. A Mead make. A brand new sporty bike for every ambitious boy or girl!

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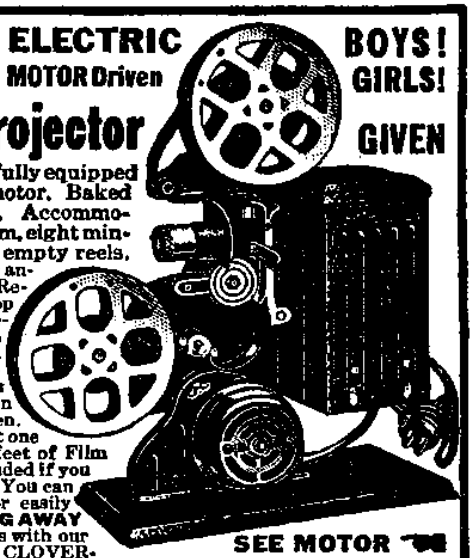
GIVEN ELECTRIC MOTOR Driven Movie Projector

BOYS! GIRLS! GIVEN



New Premium! Fully equipped with electric motor. Baked crystal enamel. Accommodates 200 feet film, eight minute show—two empty reels. Tilting device for angle projection. Reverse rewind to top spool. Framer. Reflector. SPECIAL bulb, cord and a plug. Size of picture 20 x 26 inches at a distance of ten feet from the screen. A Jim Dandy! Get one now! FREE 25 feet of Film valued at 75c included if you remit in 10 days! You can get this Projector easily by **Simply GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per our new premium plan catalog. Send no money. We trust you. Mail coupon. **Wilson Chem. Co. Inc. Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.**

SEE MOTOR

GIVEN Floor Model RADIO or RIFLE Boys - Men - Women

GIVEN! Send No Money!

IVER JOHNSON 22-Cal. Bolt action self-cocking Safety RIFLE or a Genuine 5-tube AC Superheterodyne Floor Model Radio, long or short wave band, dynamic speaker—aeroplane dial. Striped walnut cabinet. 37 ins. high. An ornament to any home. **It's unusual.** Radio, Rifle or big cash commission yours for **Simply GIVING Away FREE** art pictures with famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for burns, chaps, sores etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per new big premium plan book! Our 42nd year. Be first.

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Mail Coupon!

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Send No Money! GIVEN

A Beauty! A REAL COASTER WAGON—with a big streamlined all metal body, size 20 x 48, with 8½ in. ball-bearing wheels and 1-inch rubber tires. Yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautiful pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for chaps, burns, etc., easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture Free) and remit as per our catalog. **WILSON CHEM CO., INC. Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.**

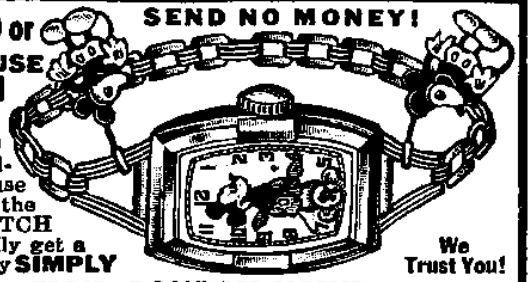
Newest type steering
BE FIRST!
MAIL COUPON NOW!

GIVEN

BANJO or Big Guitar

or MICKEY MOUSE WATCH

SEND NO MONEY!



We Trust You!

Standard Size Guitar, regulated—fretted ebonized finger-board, pearl position dots. —Tenor BANJO with 11 inch rim—16 flat top brackets—inlaid position, calf-skin head, patent pegs. See Mickey Mouse on the Dial of the watch! In colors, too! See the two charms on the bracelet. WHAT A WATCH FOR BOYS AND GIRLS! ... You can easily get a Guitar, Banjo, Watch or big cash commission by **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautifully colored Art Pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog. Many other valuable gifts. 42nd Year. We are reliable. BE FIRST!

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Town_____ State_____

PRINT YOUR LAST NAME ONLY IN SPACE BELOW

PASTE COUPON on a Penny Postcard or Mail in an Envelope Today!

TRY - WILSON'S - COUGH DROPS - 5¢ EVERYWHERE

"I have REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT"

. . . writes George Bailey

"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man". The boys kidded me about my big "paunch".
At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.
In a bathing suit . . . I was immense. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.
What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I had actually taken EIGHT INCHES off my waist . . . and 20 pounds off my weight!
It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place . . . and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!
I have a new enjoyment of life . . . I work better, eat better, play better . . . I didn't realize how much I was missing!

IF YOU DO NOT REDUCE YOUR WAIST THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS

. . . it won't cost you a penny!

We have done this for thousands of others . . . *we know* we can do as much for you . . . that's why we make this unconditional offer!

THE MASSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT

■ You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit . . . its massage-like action persistently eliminating fat with every move you make!

■ Many enthusiastic wearers write that the Weil Belt not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place . . . and with loss of fat comes increased endurance, pep and vigor!

IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE

■ The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days if your waistline is not actually 3 inches smaller . . . 3 inches of fat gone, it won't cost you one cent!

Don't Wait. Fat Is Dangerous

■ Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity. Don't wait any longer, act today!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, Inc. 5111, Hill St., New Haven, Conn.

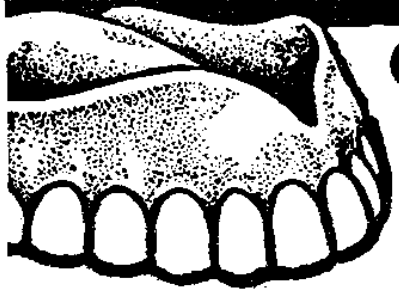
Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 Day FREE Trial Offer.

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

Use Coupon or Send Name and Address on Penny Post Card

FALSE TEETH



60 DAYS TRIAL

I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford **to pay big prices.** I have been making dental plates for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction or they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and have saved money.

SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you do not send one cent—just your name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

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for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a **FREE** sample of **Page's Pile Tablets** and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., Dept. 416-C3, Marshall, Mich., or Toronto, Ont.

IF YOU ARE POISONED BY

URIC ACID

Read Our Offer—Do This

Is Uric Acid in your blood causing "Arthritis;" stiff joints; sore muscles; rheumatic pains; neuritis; neuralgia?

Bladder weakness? Kidney irritation? Up many times at night? "Worn Out"? "Acid" Stomach? "Catch cold" easily? Skin itches and burns? Nervous?

HOW MANY SYMPTOMS HAVE YOU?

For more than 45 years The Williams Treatment has been helping others to better health and comfort. **You** try it!

WANT A 75c BOTTLE?

Mail this advertisement with 10c in stamps or coin to The Dr. D. A. Williams Co., Offer ML16, East Hampton, Conn.

We will give uric acid sufferers who send this advertisement, home address and ten cents, one 75-cent bottle (32 doses) of The Williams Treatment and booklet with DIET and other helpful suggestions. No obligation. We pay postage. No C.O.D. Only one bottle given same person, family or address. Sold since 1892.

NO BOTTLE UNLESS THIS ADVT. IS SENT

TYPEWRITER ½ Price

Easy Terms

Only 10c a Day

Save over ½ Mfg.'s Orig. Price on all standard up-to-date office models.

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WANT a new business profession of your own with all the trade you can attend to? Then **become a foot correctionist,** and in a few weeks earn big income in service fees—not medical, not chiropody—easy terms for home training, no further capital needed, no goods to buy, no agency. Established 1894. *Address*

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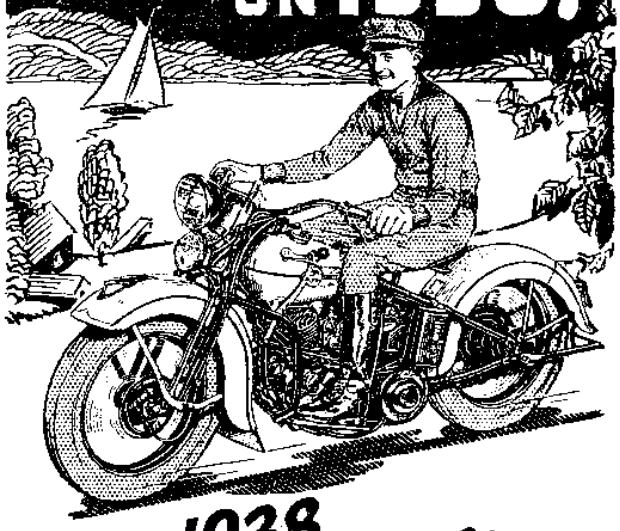
Stop Getting Up Nights

Here's one good way to flush harmful waste from kidneys and stop bladder irritation that often causes scanty, burning and smarting passage. Ask your druggist for a 35-cent box of Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules—a splendid safe and harmless diuretic and stimulant for weak kidneys and irritated bladder. Besides getting up nights, some symptoms of kidney trouble are backaches, puffy eyes, leg cramps, and moist palms, but be sure to get GOLD MEDAL—it's the genuine medicine for weak kidneys—right from Haarlem in Holland.

GET THE JUMP ON 1938!



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Pack every Autumn day with thrills—get extra months of pleasure—by owning a new 1938 Harley-Davidson with its many new features and refinements. Your smartly styled mount keeps you out in the open—you're riding a healthful hobby! You're always enjoying new scenes, new friends — distant places are brought nearer — at surprisingly low cost, too. The new 1938 Harley-Davidsons are tops for power, speed, and smooth riding, with greatest economy. No other type of transportation takes you so far at so little cost.

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Mail this coupon!

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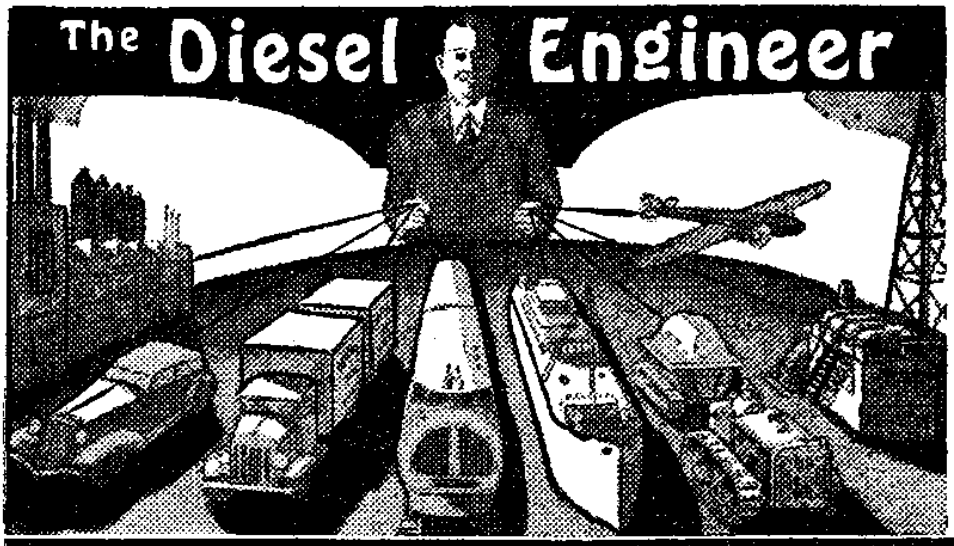
Name_____

Address_____

My age is [ ] 16-19 years, [ ] 20-30 years, [ ] 31 years and up [ ] under 16 years. Check your age group.

The Diesel Engineer



Is Your Job Safe?

Just as the gasoline engine changed or wiped out the jobs of thousands who depended on horse-drawn vehicles for their living—just as electricity changed the entire set-up in the fields of light and power—so now the Diesel engine is fast invading both the power and transportation fields, and threatening the present jobs of thousands of workers.

To Men Over 18—Under 40: This offer is NOT open to boys under 18 or men over 40. But if you are WITHIN these age limits, you owe it to yourself to investigate this unusual opportunity of acquainting yourself with a NEW field and a REAL future.

2 Diesel Lessons Free

Diesel—The New, Fast-Growing Power

Diesel engines are replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, pumps, etc.—opening up well-paid jobs for Diesel-trained men. You get all the latest Diesel developments in our course. Special diagrams for quick understanding of this new power. If jobs in your line are steadily growing scarcer, you owe it to yourself to investigate this new, progressive, uncrowded line, that in our opinion will offer good openings for the next 25 years.

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American School, Dept. D-67, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

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GUARANTEED TIRES!

GOODYEAR-GOODRICH FIRESTONE-U.S. and Other Standard Makes

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Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

World's Lowest TIRE PRICES

Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at ½ price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$1.05
29x4.50-20	2.35	1.09
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
28x5.00-19	2.65	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95
31x4	2.85	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES (High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
33x6	3.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
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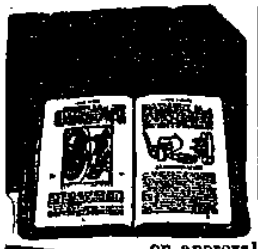

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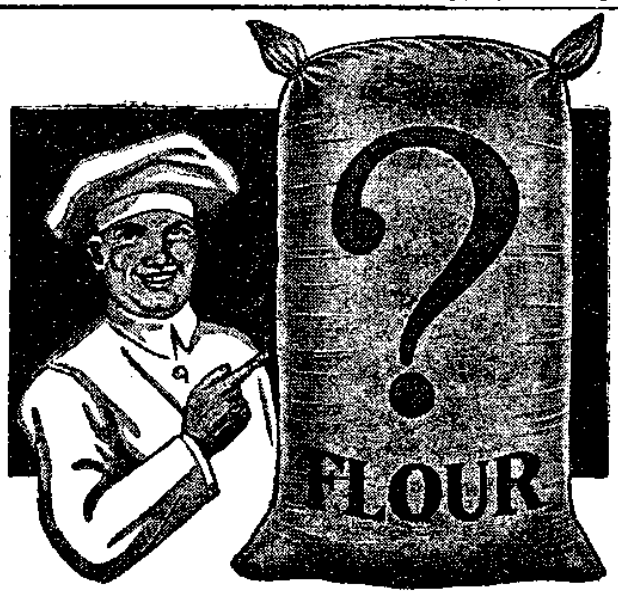

Give This Flour A New Name!

$300 IN CASH FOR BEST 15 NAMES

$50 Check Each Month for Rest of This Year— Extra Promptness Prize

Here is an amazing offer! One that should tax the imagination of every man, woman and child. You have an equal opportunity to win a big cash prize and receive a $50 check regularly each month for the three remaining months of 1937. In order to get a new name for flour, we are passing on to the readers of this magazine the opportunity of selecting a new name and winning cash prizes for their efforts. There are a lot of good names being used now, such as Big Four, Golden Harvest, Queen's Best, Lily White, Kansas Pride, and others. We want a new name, and for the best fifteen sent in, we will award $300 in cash prizes, plus a $50 check each month for the three remaining months of 1937 as a promptness prize.

The First Name You Think of May Be a Winner

Think of the many names that are now being used and suggest a new name for flour—one that you feel will appeal to the housewife. The name you send in may be of one, two or three words, separate or combined. It will cost you nothing to send in a name. You may win one of the fifteen prizes.

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Write your name for this flour on a penny post card or sheet of paper, sign your own name and address, and mail within three days from the time you read this announcement. It will pay you to be prompt. Your name for flour must be mailed before Dec. 18, 1937. Fifteen cash prizes will be awarded. If the name you send in is selected as First Prize winner, you will receive $100 in cash, and as an extra prize for promptness you will receive a check for $50 each month for the three remaining months of this year. Second Prize will be $50; Third Prize $25; Fourth Prize $15; and eleven prizes of $10 each. These fifteen prizes are in addition to the extra prize of $50 a month which is offered to the first prize winner for promptness in sending in the winning name. Duplicate prizes will be awarded in the event of a tie.

Right now you may be thinking of just the name we are looking for—the name that will win First Prize! Sometimes the first name you think of is the best name to send in. Send only one name—your favorite to

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The draftsman has been called the Junior Engineer, which accurately describes his work, position and pay. He combines knowledge of principles, mechanism and construction details with ability to draw plans and indicate methods. Usually his salary is considerably above the wages of the mechanic and, of course, less than that of the engineer.

Become a Draftsman

Enjoy a Real Job in Industry

Chance for Promotion

Helping design new buildings, machines or construction methods, the draftsman knows what his firm is planning or considering. It may be the superintendent—engineer—even the prospective buyer with whom he consults. These contacts, plus his experience, place him in an excellent position for promotion when next there is a good opening.

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Train Now for 40 and the Years Between!

Even if you are now only 18, 25 or 30, you should *look ahead* —begin training TODAY for the job you want at 50. Training helps you to be independent—self-supporting. It helps you to enjoy associations denied to untrained men. Training helps you to offer your family advantages far in excess of what you could give them as an untrained man. Investigate NOW.

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Voodoo magic or fiendish mind, it brought the awful terror of the plague to the swamps—and it brought Cap Fury double-quick to fight it!

The Green Plague

By
WALLACE
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A Complete,
Fascinating
Book-length Novel.

CHAPTER I.

CITY OF GREEN DEATH.

CAPTAIN JOHN FURY, skipper of the *Whirlwind*, first saw the green death in the public square. More than twoscore persons stared from eyes

sunken with mortal agony through the tight strands of the barbed-wire enclosure. Their faces were grotesquely twisted, hideously green.

Brilliant, intense lights played down through the weirdly moss-draped branches of the huge magnolias surrounding the square. They revealed the hastily provided pen of barbs, the victims within it, the straw-hatted police guards with shotguns. The guards maintained a respectful, fearsome distance from the corners of the stockade.

But few persons moved in the four streets outside the grove of the city's once gay and happy assembling place. Those who approached hurried past the stockade with averted faces. Some of the green plague victims were standing, clutching at the strands of wire. A few were pacing about, crying out in plaintive voices.

Death already had mercifully claimed some of the isolated citizens. Their bodies lay on the bedded grass of the park, awaiting daylight for removal. An occasional automobile rolled quickly past the barricade. The persons in these cars came and went from tall, old houses flanking one side of the city.

The old houses were tightly shuttered and their doors were barred. Descendants of the older French and Creole families resided in these one-time mansions of the town that had long been

called Champeauville. They were the aristocrats of a long line of settlers that had first established the community on the edge of the ghost-gray, marching forests of the Great Cypress Swamps, to the eastward of the Mississippi delta.

Captain John Fury halted at the corner of the gruesome square. He was a broad-shouldered, square-jawed, competent figure of a man as he stood there, clad in unusual shore-going white flannels. Keen eyes of Arctic blue, set in the fine wrinkles of wind-tan from the sea, surveyed the horror. A straw-hatted policeman with a red, sweating face waved a shotgun.

"Yo' all, come no closer!" he commanded. "You can't loaf about in the square! Be on your way!"

Captain Fury spoke to the tall, lanky man beside him.

"By all the holies, Peter! We should have arrived a week ago! The message of Andre Champeau was delayed too long!"

The tall, lanky man was Peter Doom. His solemn, long-jawed face and black, straight hair gave him the appearance of an undertaker. He was one of Captain Fury's closest companions in many adventures. Peter was a former police inspector of the New York department.

"Purple hell, Skipper!" grunted Peter. "It gives me the shivers! Murder now, or violence, I can well stomach! But I'm wanting little of this!"

THE SKIPPER turned slowly, moving as the police guard had commanded. He could see that a few persons afflicted with the green plague were of the erect, prideful type of the more aristocratic citizens. They bore the agony of approaching death with calm stoicism. Others were of the ragged, "swamper" brand of residents. There were a few Negroes among them.

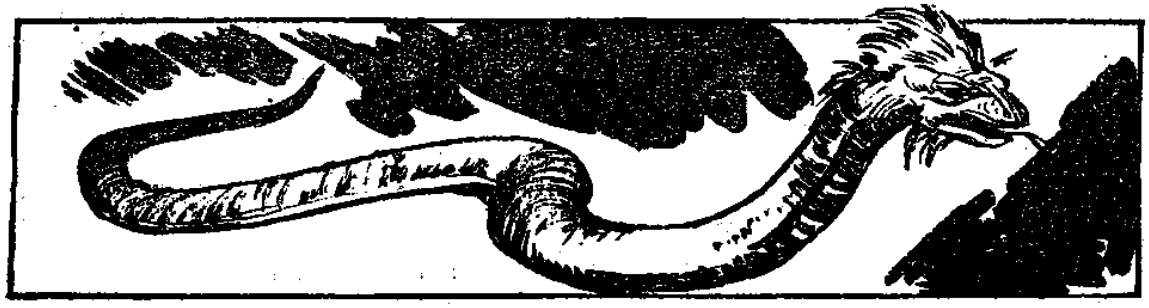
"The green plague is making no distinction," stated The Skipper. "We will move along, Peter. Perhaps it would be best not to attempt to make contact with Andre Champeau until we know more of this."

"As for me," said Peter, "the quicker we get back to the clean river and the ship, the sooner I will draw a full breath."

The pair of oddly matched men walked out of the square, The Skipper's stocky body swaying to the rolling gait of a seaman, something he could never quite overcome on land. They went down a street that showed open water at its end. On the other side of the city, away from the shuttered residents of the oldest families, black and ghostly oil derricks loomed against the sky. The discovery of the oil, its wealth of black gold had changed the formerly sleepy Champeauville into a roaring industrial city.

Captain Fury had been informed that this flood of oil had borne into the isolated swamp town a new kind of population. Almost overnight the community had been transformed. Even the name had been changed to the more metropolitan one of Riverton. From the industrial side of the city came the sounds of street traffic, of moving crowds.

"We will return to the *Whirlwind* tonight," directed Cap Fury. "In the



morning, we should make a secret visit to Andre Champeau on his island below the town."

The street closer to the Mississippi water front became more populated. It was a strangely mixed throng that moved. Ragged men from the swamps, known as "swamp angels," in town to feed off the scraps of the city's new wealth. Hard-boiled oil workers shouldered along the sidewalks. Many had been drinking freely, giving themselves courage against this mysterious plague of the green faces.

The street terminated in a wide levee wharf. This space was occupied by several hundred persons. A few Negro men and women, mostly servants of the older residents, were congregated in small groups. Some were on their knees, being exhorted by others to flee from the green death.

The Skipper and Peter heard one man crying out.

"It is Mata!" he was saying. "The voodoo curse of Mata! She is a witch! Andre Champeau himself has said it! Mata must be destroyed or we will all die!"

THE man speaking was half white, a breed exhorter from the swamps.

"Mata?" said The Skipper, musingly. "She is the one spoken of by Andre Champeau in his message. Champeau said that what he himself started as a bit of humor, was threatening to become a scourge."

"One fine helluva joke!" rumbled Peter Doom. "But look over there, Skipper! Anything could happen in this kind of a town!"

Peter indicated what appeared to be a sort of exhibition, perhaps a side show for newcomers, for curious tourists who came down the river to the new city of Riverton. There were half a dozen animals in a stiff wire cage. They appeared to be house cats, only they were five to six times the size of ordinary domesticated felines.

"Swamp wild cats!" stated The Skipper. "Hell and all to handle, and they never are tamed!"

"That fellow seems to have the Indian sign on them," said Peter.

He pointed out a queerly clad figure wearing a coon-skin cap with tails in all that midsummer heat. A man with face and bared arms as bronzed by swamp sun as those of

an Indian. But his face was clean and handsome, and his hair was the undeniable brown of a white man.

The man in the coon-skin cap had entered the cage of the swamp cats. His low voice sent the animals spitting and snarling to perches in the big cage. A few persons gathered around.

"This 'gator was more than two hundred years old!" sang out the man in the coon-skin cap. "He's the biggest ol' 'gator ever found in Great Cypress!"

A man close to the big cage said, "Cat Randolph caught that 'gator. Cat Randolph ain't much tamer than his damned swamp cats."

The Skipper saw that the man in the coon-skin cap had piercing gray eyes. He saw "Cat" Randolph looking at him and Peter. There was searching scrutiny in the man's gaze, as if he were checking and classifying each stranger.

The stuffed and glazed alligator in the cage with the wild cats was a monster, with white ivory teeth showing where the mouth was propped open.

"That hearty may not be tamed, Peter," said Cap quietly, "but he has much more on his mind than showing off his cats and the 'gator. I have a feeling that he might be a man who could give us some inside information on anything that might come out of the swamps. Perhaps the green plague——"

The Skipper's observation was cut off. A man's voice called out at the river side of the levee wharf.

"Chief Ulan! There's one of 'em floatin' out there!"

Cap and Peter pivoted, swinging toward the river. Four immense floodlights shot incandescent, white beams across the slow, yellow current of the Mississippi. The water was like muddy oil along the rim of the levee which barred its floods from Riverton.

THE man addressed as Chief Ulan was a fat, double-chinned policeman wearing one of the straw hats of midsummer. He wore the star of police chief prominently on his white shirt. Half a dozen other policemen were stationed along the levee front.

"Where, Andrews?" shouted Chief Ulan. "Out there—— Yes, I see!"

Those of the wharf crowd who surged toward the front could also see it now. The thing came spinning slowly on the yellow river under the glare of the floodlights.

"By my sacred aunt!" rumbled Peter Doom. "It's a man! Look! His face is green—he's——"

The Skipper caught Peter's arm and pulled him to one side. The fat Chief Ulan had issued a sharp command. All could see that the man floating down the river was alive. His body was naked above the waist. It was enclosed by a queerly crude life preserver, apparently constructed of bark.

The hideous green face was ghastly under the floodlights. But the man's hands were beating, moving slowly up and down, as if he were merely marking time with death, and not attempting to swim. The body swung around and the back of the head showed, with white skin across the shoulders.

Perhaps the green-faced man at last saw the lights through dimming eyes. His hands paddled. His face once more turned toward the crowd along the wharf, as if in supplication. He cried out once, faintly.

The police chief's voice barked.

Four or five shotguns thundered together. The green face of the floating man was all but obliterated by the blasting shot. His torn head sank limply to his breast, and he ceased to suffer. Peter Doom growled an oath, started a forward step.

"Too late now, Peter!" snapped The Skipper, detaining him. "And for the moment, we are keeping out of this! Listen!"

Voices of Negro men on the wharf were chanting weirdly in fear. The

half-white exhorter from the swamps screamed out:

"Mata! It's another messenger of the voodoo! The witch is making her devil's brew on one of the swamp islands up the river! Who will go with me?"

Those nearest the exhorter drew away. He was left alone. Evidently, none there cared to join in the enterprise he suggested.

The Skipper said, "We'll get to the boat and—no, wait!"

Down the levee a short distance, piled, broken barrels flamed with the oily smoke of turpentine resin from the swamp pines. A small launch loaded with policemen had put out. A long boat hook reached and snagged into the life preserver sustaining the floating dead man.

Now the crowd rolled back in a wave from the river front. The body was being pulled toward the wharf, but none of the policemen was touching it except with the boat hook. The pole of the hook was passed ashore.

"By all the green hells!" rumbled Peter Doom. "I have no stomach for any more of this!"

The shot-riddled body was pulled into the rolling flame of the burning barrels. The Skipper nodded. "Perhaps there is sense to that. We will slip away, Peter."

BUT the crowd was clearing the wharf. The tires of an open roadster squealed as the car skidded to a stop. A tall girl with an oval, dusky face and blowing black hair was at the wheel. She swept the wharf with luminous, seeking eyes. The roadster shot forward, straight toward The Skipper and Peter.

The girl leaned far out, braking the car again abruptly.

"You would be Captain John Fury?" she exclaimed in a low but clear contralto.

The Skipper said, "I am Captain Fury."

"This is for you!" the girl said hurriedly. "I must not stay to explain or be questioned! It is from my father!"

The roadster spewed sand from under its wheels. The Skipper was holding a white envelope, unsealed. He saw the police chief, Ulan, start toward the already moving roadster, then hesitate. The little car whirled off the wharf and passed another open car as it went away up the street.

Apparently the police chief had not seen the envelope passed to The Skipper. There were many strangers about the wharf. But Cap saw the man known as Cat Randolph start toward him, then pause, staring after the roadster.

Cat Randolph shot one searching glance at The Skipper and Peter. His eyes held the bright, inquiring gleam of some curious animal. Then the man's lean shoulders shrugged slightly and he turned back toward his cage of swamp cats.

The Skipper was drawing Peter into the darkness away from the floodlights.

"We will see and hear more of the man in the coon-skin cap," stated Cap, quietly. "He is something more than a swamper."

PETER shook his solemn head. After months of amazing adventures with Captain John Fury, Peter had not yet learned to follow the swift deductions of The Skipper.

The other open automobile arrived on the wharf. A Negro was driving. The white man in it was swarthy and black-haired. He arose and waved a hand on which a diamond gleamed in a ring. Words came from a tight, small mouth under a beak of a nose.

"Yo' all are seein' for yo'selves!" the man shouted. "They come from the river! They will continue to come until yo' all have made Andre Champeau

CAT RANDOLPH

give up this black witch, this Mata! Have we not had enough?"

Chief Ulan was directing his police to get all the crowd off the wharf. He halted and walked over to the car.

"Maybe it wouldn't be so well to stir 'em up to-night, Mr. Jutt!" he said distinctly. "Better in daylight maybe! Samuel Pound is coming!"

"Great glory!" rumbled Peter Doom. "What goes on here, Skipper?"

"We seem to have come upon a great deal, Peter," said Cap calmly.

A tall, ponderous, broad-hatted man, head and shoulders above others, was striding across the wharf toward the car containing Yall Jutt. It became apparent he was the man the police chief had called Samuel Pound.

Samuel Pound seemed to be a survivor of the vanishing class widely known as "southern colonels." His broad straw hat topped a round face that was made to seem longer by a neatly trimmed gray goatee. When Samuel Pound spoke, his voice had an oratorical ring.

"Yall Jutt!" he said loudly to the black-haired man in the open car. "Any one who speaks against Andre Champeau is accusing my best friend and the leading citizen of Champeauville! Champeauville, I said, Yall Jutt! You fellows can call it Riverton, but as long as I am mayor, I will continue to recognize the name of the honorable family which founded it, suh!"

Yall Jutt, with his peculiar name and his bediamonded hand, sat down in his car, muttering. The big man, Mayor Samuel Pound, as he had proclaimed himself, moved closer to the car.

"There are strangers here to-night, Yall Jutt!" said Samuel Pound. "I would have all newcomers know my administration does not subscribe to the false superstitions of——"

The Skipper pulled Peter's arm. He said, "The message delivered by the girl is from Andre Champeau. It is best we make it to the boat unobserved for the present."

CHAPTER II.

FIRE OF GREEN DEATH.

CAPTAIN JOHN FURY had never before been confronted by such an odd diversity of characters in so short a space of time. Nor had The Skipper ever faced such queerly blended superstition and fact, such ghastly evidence of uncanny terror and death, such a complicated puzzle.

This Mayor Samuel Pound was still denouncing the man he called Yall Jutt, as Cap and Peter slipped away from the levee wharf. Five minutes later, the pair passed through a dark alley that ended on one of the numerous canals running from the levees through the city.

The canal was murky and shadowed. And the queer, stream-lined boat lying concealed there was only another

shadow. The hull of the pointed craft was of a mirror-like alloy which took on the color of its surroundings. It had displayed no light until a low, penetrating whistle came from Captain Fury.

The signal lights sprang up. They showed two sailors on guard. The sailors would have been marked as a tough pair in the toughest of cities. As Cap and Peter boarded, the stream-lined boat moved with only a queer hissing sound, where there would have been explosions from a launch.

Water boiled at the craft's stern as it came around. A bubbling white wake appeared, and the boat picked up amazing speed almost instantly. The water was being drawn into tubes that extended the length of the craft. It was expelled with the force of driving steel rods. There was no propeller.

The stream-lined boat was powered by suction motors set inside and operated by a special oil-burning engine. This power was one of the inventions of Captain Fury. Electrical engineer, shipmaster, explorer of the deepest oceans, the strange Skipper controlled many devices far in advance of the most modern experiments.

For the power of this small craft was to be found on a greater scale in the mysterious ship of which he was the master, the *Whirlwind*. Power that enabled The Skipper and his adventurous crew to move with incredible speed from one place to another. And on the *Whirlwind* was such a ship's crew as had never before been assembled. A lot of fighting men for which there was no equal on any vessel sailing the Seven Seas.

The Skipper spread the message delivered by the girl under the light of the boat's cabin. The craft had left a boiling wake across the miles of the Mississippi above where the great river spread into the delta region of the Gulf of Mexico.

DALE

"We have acted wisely, Peter," stated Cap, passing the message along.

Peter read:

CAPTAIN JOHN FURY: My daughter Dale brings you this message. I am grateful for your coming. Friends have reported you in the city, and my daughter could not mistake you. I need your help, but for the present, it will be best if we do not make personal contact. As you have seen, the city has been struck by the death of the green plague. I know as little of this terrible death as you yourself, perhaps less. But I must protect one who is falsely accused of causing the plague. I know that some other person is responsible. But the safety of yourself and your crew, of my daughter and myself, of others, depends upon your identity not being revealed too quickly.

I sent for you because you are perhaps the only man in the world who can uncover and cope with this menace. It threatens to destroy the city's oldest and most law-abiding element. I can give only one tip. Watch the striped convict ship, three miles up the river, at work on the levee. I believe the green death came

with convicts who were set afloat on the river and who succeeded in landing before they were discovered. I will communicate with you again soon.

ANDRE CHAMPEAU.

Peter Doom's reaction was instant. The former police inspector from New York had all the desire for swift action of a trained copper.

"This old Champeau knows his stuff," approved Peter. "Then we will clean out this convict ship at once and——"

The Skipper shook his head slowly.

"It is not so simple as that, Peter. Perhaps the green plague has been transmitted by convicts, as Champeau says, but I judge they are only a medium employed by others. That we must discover."

PETER DOOM was grumbling as the stream-lined boat came alongside a rusty old tramp ship at anchor several miles across the river and well above the city of the green death. Only the glow of Riverton's lights could be seen from this anchorage.

The tramp ship, the *Whirlwind*, seemed to be a black, rusted old oil tanker. Her three hundred feet of disreputable length suggested nothing out of the ordinary. The *Whirlwind* was no different from scores of other tankers coming into the Mississippi from the Gulf and taking cargo from the Riverton tanks.

But as the stream-lined boat came close, a strange thing happened. Rusty plates divided in the tanker's hull at the water level. The Skipper's boat glided inside the lower hold of the ship into a dockage space that could not have been suspected by any one observing the vessel.

There were other craft in that neatly devised lower hold. One was a small, modern submarine with a knifelike conning tower. Another was a twin-motored amphibian plane with folded wings. There were other small boats of metal alloy.

The Skipper and Peter were shot to the upper deck of the tanker in a small elevator. They emerged under the wheelhouse bridge on the foredeck. A chief mate who was undersized and seemed to be the ugliest human afloat, greeted them.

He was "Marlin Spike" Briggs, long with The Skipper. His face bore countless scars from hand-to-hand battles in many ports.

A rotund, red-faced man with redder hair was beside the chief mate. This man was James ("Bumps") McCarthy, movie cameraman for a world-wide news-reel company. Bumps had had only one assignment for a long time. And that was Peter Doom, ever since that hard-bitten ex-inspector of police had been forced to resign from the New York department by certain politicians.

Peter's methods of handling killers and crooks had been a little too strong for those higher up.

Bumps McCarthy was bubbling over at this moment.

"Boy, howdy!" he exclaimed. "While you've been prowlin' over in the town, there's something going on up the river! Come over here! Have a look at that fire, and listen! I've had the old night camera ready for an hour, just waitin' to——"

"By the great hornspoon, Skipper!" cut in Spike Briggs. "For once Bumps has got somethin', I'm thinkin'! We've been hearin' howls an' singin' like the old devil himself was throwin' a party!"

Though a matter of perhaps three miles lay between the *Whirlwind* and the crimson glow of a fire against the gray and black ghosts of swamp trees beyond a levee above the city, the river itself acted as a medium for carrying a weird, chanting sound that rose and fell.

The Skipper wasted no time for

further information. As his command caused the quick weighing of the anchor and the old tanker moved slowly on a clanking old engine, Cap Fury was switching from the shore flannels into his captain's uniform. A third of his stocky body seemed to disappear into great sea boots with flaring tops.

"Douse all lights, Spike!" he commanded as the tanker started across the river, slowly moving toward the increasing crimson flare of the fire behind the levee. "Switch to the tubular power, and lay to far enough off to escape observation!"

CHAMPEAU

THE *Whirlwind* lay to a mile or more off the straight line of the levee marking the shore above Riverton. In this position, the rusty tramp ship could not be picked out by watching eyes. The stream-lined boat carried The Skipper, Peter, Bumps and Spike Briggs when it again glided onto the river. The craft approached the place of the glowing fire with the silence and invisibility of a river ghost.

The Skipper signaled to hold off, as a strange spectacle was swiftly unfolded.

Peter Doom said, "There's the striped ship! The convict boat that old Champeau mentioned!"

The Skipper nodded; producing several pairs of powerful night glasses. These brought a wide, black bayou piercing the high levee into view. The black-and-white striped hulk of an ancient river steamboat with a paddle wheel at its stern showed perhaps half a mile above the bayou.

But it was in the black bayou itself that the glowing fire appeared against the trees. The Skipper cautioned complete silence. They could hear the rusty oarlocks of small boats creaking. These boats were moving between the bayou and the convict ship.

The Skipper's binoculars swung to the bayou, to a rounded hummock of an island just inside the levee walls. Lurid flame showed a background of huge cypress trees draped with the inevitable Spanish moss, which gave the branches the appearance of human giants with strangely clothed arms.

The night binoculars pulled the scene closer. On the foredeck of the stream-lined craft, Bumps McCarthy set up his old "Sure-fire" night movie camera. Two or three small boats, evidently loaded with gray-clad men from the convict ship, were lying in the mouth of the bayou.

The island hummock was filled with perhaps a hundred persons, white and black. Those with colored skins were on their knees, their bodies weaving from side to side, their hands uplifted.

All were chanting. But the chant was not a song. Weird, unholy cries came shrilly on the night. There seemed no doubt but that some form of voodoo worship was being conducted. The crimson fire was on a square, raised altar of black earth. At the edges of the

fire could be seen huge, round, brass kettles containing some dark steaming brew.

"Aa-ee! Aa-ee! Aa-ee!"

The chanting voices might have been in the depths of Africa, or in the wilderness thorn bush of Haiti. And as those on their knees cried out, more white and Negro men could be seen lying or standing outside the circle. These men were clad in somber gray. Chains clanked on their ankles. When the men moved, a great sharp spike fastened to the chains prevented any sudden movement to escape.

BUMPS McCARTHY was grinding away at his camera. The mirrorlike boat was unseen. The Skipper studied the surroundings of the island in the bayou. He saw that a current flowed from the bayou into the river. This bayou apparently disappeared into the Great Cypress Swamp, no doubt dividing into many channels. Cap knew that an overflow of flood water from this swamp was held back from the city of Riverton by a cross levee set above the town.

Some of the voodoo worshipers were of the gaunt type of white men, partly clad in skins, and some wore coon-skin caps. These swamp angels mixed freely with the Negro men and women.

Upon the edge of the altar of fire appeared a red-robed figure that seemed to be that of an ancient Negro crone. Her head was covered by the hood of the red robe. She swayed and danced, her black hands and arms waving bare about her head.

Other women ladled the steaming brew from the pots into bowls. These were passed around. The Skipper identified the red-robed priestess as the leader, known among those of the voodoo cult as the Maman Loi. His powerful binoculars brought the sorceress close.

"This Mata, of whom they spoke in the city, would be an old Negro crone," stated The Skipper, suddenly. "Champeau spoke of her as such. Do you note anything strange, Peter?"

The red-robed priestess was dancing, whirling her bared arms in a frenzy of emotion. At times, her clear, penetrating voice pitched the unholy chant to a higher note. Peter centered his glasses upon her.

"By all the purple hells!" he rumbled. "Her arms and hands are as smooth as silk. None but a young woman could move the way she does!"

"Exactly!" said The Skipper. "Those are not the hands of an old Negro crone! But watch! Something is about to happen!"

"BUMPS" McCARTHY

A SCRAWNY white man, evidently a swamp angel with his coon-skin cap, was seen to be lying upon the ground, as if overcome by the frenzied emotion of the moment. The red-robed priestess suddenly halted in her mad gyrations. Her straightened hand was pointing at the figure of the white man.

Two convicts with clanking chains sprang forward. One of these was as huge a man as The Skipper had ever seen. He was of the light mulatto type, but his arms were queerly long and his face showed thick, liverlike lips. This convict had been chewing on a stalk of sugar cane.

The voice of the red-robed, hooded priestess shrilled out.

"Bring him, the sacrifice of the white goat, Sugar Cane!" she directed. "Lay him upon the altar! The green serpent must be appeased!"

The words came clearly to the men on the stream-lined boat. Bumps McCarthy seldom came upon a picture that set him back, but sweat now was pouring from the cameraman's red face. And it was not all from the steaming heat coming from the swamp.

The huge convict called "Sugar Cane" caught up the inert white swamper in his gorillalike arms. He carried him toward the blazing fire on the flat altar. Others heaped more resin pine upon the flames.

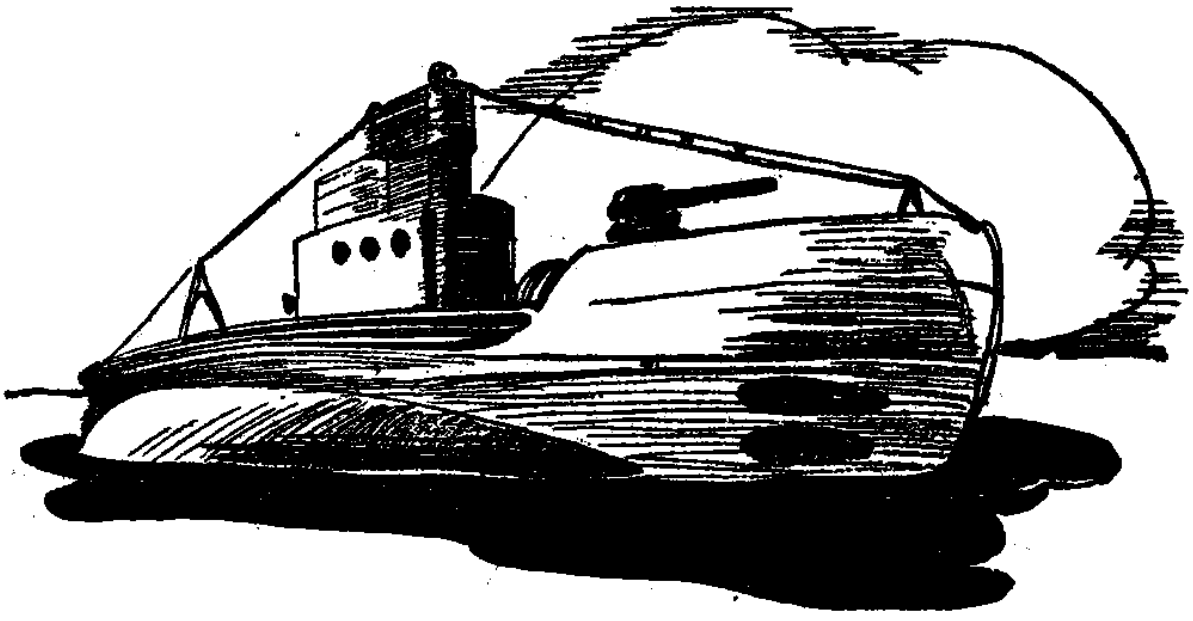
"Great Davy Jones!" muttered Spike Briggs. "They're goin' to roast the swab alive, Skipper!"

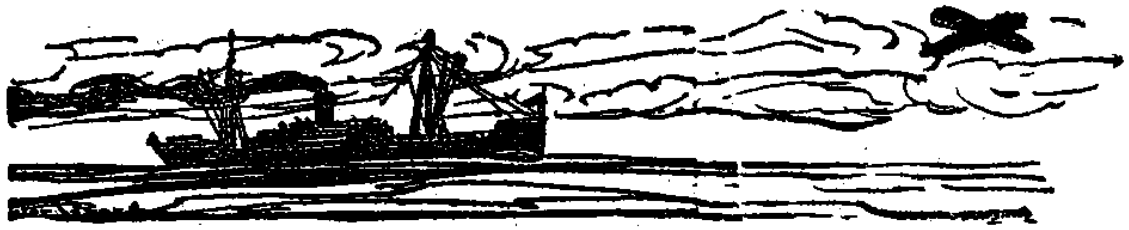
But Cap Fury made no reply. His glasses had swung to another figure that now came stealthily into the shadows under the moss-draped trees. A gleam of metal had caught The Skipper's eyes.

The man appeared to be spying upon the voodoo ceremony, for he remained with his body shielded by the trunk of a huge cypress tree. Then Cap saw what had appeared to be a weapon. The man's right hand was a curved steel hook. The movement of this indicated the man had had his right arm amputated below the elbow.

Now the firelight flicked across the spy's face, and Cap could see he was a white man with even, good-looking features. The Skipper judged that he was well dressed. The man's position was such that he could observe clearly as the scrawny swamper was borne toward the altar fire by the huge convict, Sugar Cane.

Peter Doom was swearing. Bumps was sweating more than ever. The red-robed sorceress screamed with the ecstasy of the sacrificial moment, or so it





seemed. Even Cap Fury was doubtful of what was about to happen.

"Train the forward gun on that big convict, Spike!" he commanded. "We can't see a man burned, so blow him to hell if he——"

But the huge Sugar Cane did not swing the swamp angel into the fire. He dropped him on the flat altar clear of the flames, and the red-robed Maman Loi waved her hands over the still body with weird gesturing. The chanting arose to a screaming pitch as the voodooists sprang to their feet and started a slow dance around the altar.

AT that instant, the priestess took something from under her red robe, flinging it upon the fire. The blaze flared, changed from crimson to an eerie greenish glow. It painted the trees around, the faces of all the voodooists in the same hue.

Two convicts were bringing strips of bark bound together. They enveloped the scrawny body of the swamp angel with these. They were like the life preserver in which the other green-faced man had floated down upon the stricken city less than an hour before.

"Hold up the gun, Spike!" grated The Skipper. "Our friend, the priestess, would have her followers believe the green death comes from that blaze!"

Whether or not the voodooists believed this, they were suddenly shrinking away. Some were retreating, vanishing among the trees. It became plain that, in some manner, the green plague was about to come upon the man now bound in the life preserver of bark.

The Skipper saw the spying white man with the steel hook for a hand move away from his concealing tree. But he was keeping the trunk between him and those about the fire. The red-robed sorceress cried out.

"The green serpent again is angry, but he will be appeased!"

From the branches of the cypress over the altar appeared a sinuous, swaying length. It brought a gasp from Bumps and an oath from Spike.

"The voodoo snake himself!" exclaimed the chief mate. "Skipper, it's got the feathers!"

The writhing length seemed to sway down from the branch of the tree. Its tongue showed red. Its head appeared to be hooded with feathers.

"The Feathered Green Serpent," stated Cap. "It's all a part of the voodoo show, whether it's here or in Jujuland! Probably the thing is of papier-mâché!"

The imitation serpent swung low over the inanimate swamp angel bound with bark. Then its length began to withdraw into the tree.

Now only the red-robed priestess and Sugar Cane, the giant mulatto convict, remained at the altar beside the steaming pots. The priestess spoke. The red blaze had died, but Peter Doom said, "Skipper, that mug's face has turned green! That's the way it's done!"

BEYOND what they had witnessed, there was no way of determining how the virus of the green plague had entered the body of the swamp angel. But the victim's face was now a livid green. Suddenly, the man was no longer inert upon the altar. He was springing up,

clawing at his throat. A scream of agonizing horror issued from his widely opened mouth.

It was evident that the huge Sugar Cane scorned the green plague, or he was too dumb to understand or fear the death. For he caught the wildly screaming swamp angel and swept him into his arms. He strode with him to the edge of the black bayou. A single heave, and the man with the green face was flung far out into the current moving toward the river.

Suddenly, there was the explosion of a motor boat's engine back in the bayou. Still in her red robe and hood, the priestess fled from the altar. Other small boats were moving. Two were going back toward the convict ship. Sugar Cane, the convict, entered another boat with several of his fellows.

The Skipper saw that this boat did not go toward the convict ship, but was being rowed back into the swamp. Cap looked for some sign of the white man with a steel hook for an arm, but he had vanished. All at once, the altar fire was dying. There was only the clunking of oars toward the convict ship.

Cap's quick order swung the streamlined boat. He could see the dark object floating from the bayou. The swamp angel's screams marked his position. The Skipper was stripping off his big sea boots.

"For the present, we shall not risk any contact with the green plague!" he rapped out. "Spike, shoot the boat back to the *Whirlwind!* As soon as I am away, signal the ship for the blue light! Perhaps I can discover more about the green death!"

"By my sacred aunt, Skipper!" gulped Peter. "You're not meaning to take a chance on——"

"I shall land the man with the green face," announced Cap. "I have my own theory of the green plague, and perhaps I am immune!"

The Skipper dived from the streamlined boat. With the officers and crew of the *Whirlwind*, the captain's command was absolute. The Skipper might indeed be risking his life, but he had given his order for the boat to return silently and unseen to the *Whirlwind*. He had called for the blue searchlight from the ship.

CHAPTER III.

GREEN DIAMONDS.

AS always, when there was extreme danger which but one man should risk, The Skipper was taking that chance alone. He was guided as he swam by the dying screams of the swamp angel in the life preserver. Cap could tell the slow river current was swinging the man toward the levee wall. The stream would then carry him down to Riverton.

Perhaps this one would not float into the lights of the city, was Cap's thought. And if not, then he might contrive to drag himself ashore and add to the menace of the green plague.

But The Skipper swam slowly, keeping pace with the floating man. He desired to be farther from the black bayou and the convict ship when he landed this victim of the voodoo ceremony. So Cap

was nearly a mile down and the lights of the town showed plainly, when the piercing blue-ray searchlight from the *Whirlwind* shot across the river, seeking to guide him.

The green face under the blue light was an awesome sight as the colors combined. The Skipper was in the circle, and he spotted the opening of another bayou piercing the levee and entering the swamps behind it. He surged toward the plague victim, carefully spotting the bark life preserver, by which he intended to tow the man into the bayou and to shore.

And at that instant, a flat-bottomed boat of the swamps, propelled by an almost silent motor, shot out of the bayou and directly toward him.

"Don't touch the green man!" came a crisp, commanding voice. "It is sure death!"

The Skipper rolled over. He was looking at the man in the coon-skin cap who had been on the city wharf—Cat Randolph. The man was standing in the flatboat, a pole hook in his hands. Cap disregarded the order, his hand snapping upon the life preserver of the floating green-faced man.

The Skipper was totally unprepared for the action of the man in the boat. The hooked pole lifted and slapped down upon his head, driving him under the surface. Stunned, The Skipper could only flounder and attempt swimming away under water. The attack had been wholly unexpected.

But as he emerged, the hard steel hook of the long pole rapped him again. This time the blow brought blankness. The Skipper turned over, sinking, unconscious.

CAP had no means of knowing that the encounter had been witnessed from the *Whirlwind,* more than a mile away. He did not know that the wildly cursing Spike Briggs attempted to return in the stream-lined boat to his rescue, but that Cat Randolph's flat craft had vanished in the myriad bayous of Great Cypress before the chief mate of the *Whirlwind* could reach the first of the bayous into which the flatboat had disappeared.

The Skipper did not know how long he had been out. The painful glow of a fire across his aching eyes awakened him. Cap attempted to move slowly. He discovered that his arms and legs had been bound with thick strands of cotton twine, the kind employed as fishing lines in the swamp bayous.

Cap saw that the fire had been built in a sand pit. The tall, bronzed Cat Randolph moved around the blaze. They were on a small sandy island. The Skipper did not move or speak. He could see that moss-draped trees surrounded the spot. The hoarse croaking of frogs, the plaintive cries of night birds told him he had been carried deep into the swamps.

Cap watched through slitted eyes. The tall Cat Randolph moved with the lithe grace of an animal. The swamp angel in the bark life preserver was lying close to the blazing pit. Cap saw that he was dead. His green face was now bloated and distorted.

Cat Randolph took up the poled boat hook with which he had knocked out The Skipper. He pulled the dead victim of the green plague to the edge of the blazing pit and permitted the body to roll into the fire. When this gruesome task was accomplished, he walked across the sand and stood over Cap Fury.

The odor from the blazing pit hung on the grayish, miasmatic mist of the swamp. The flame cast an inferno glow against the dark trees. The Skipper detected a slight movement beyond and to one side of the fire. He had not heard a boat land or go away. But there was the metallic gleam that had seemed like a weapon during the voodoo rites, but which was the steel hook taking the

place of a right hand for the white man who had spied on the weird ceremony.

Cap could not see the man's face or body. But he did see eyes. There were two pairs. The firelight glowed in them. The Skipper made a quick guess that the second pair belonged to a woman. They were watching the movements of Cat Randolph. Cap was convinced that Cat Randolph knew the watchers were there. Perhaps they had joined him while The Skipper was unconscious.

Before Cat Randolph could speak, The Skipper heard another voice. It was some distance away, but The Skipper's keen ears caught the unmistakable squeak of an oath that could be from no other but Spike Briggs. He could hear a faint splashing, and he judged Spike and others had come to find him, and perhaps grounded their boat and were attempting to search the treacherous swamp on foot.

Cat Randolph also heard that voice. He spoke quickly.

"You are Captain John Fury, and Andre Champeau sent for you. I am Cat Randolph, and you will no doubt hear more of me. You have seen the green death, and you have seen me burn a body. You will do well not to interfere in the affairs of Riverton. There is nothing you can do."

PERHAPS Cat Randolph would have said more. He was fumbling in a pocket of his ragged garments. Then a shot whipped across the gray swamp. It was followed by a loud oath in a heavy voice, the voice of Sugar Cane, the giant convict. Other shots replied instantly. Spike Briggs yelled an oath.

Then The Skipper saw one pair of the watching eyes come closer. A graceful, sinuous figure of a beautiful Creole woman glided past the fire. Her arms were bare below a closely clinging purple garment. Even here in the swamp, the woman's ripe, red mouth showed heavy and drooping with lipstick.

The woman was very dark of skin. Every movement was pantherish. The woman's hands fluttered and swayed. She said. "Cat! Come on! If you have the diamonds, you don't want to run into that crowd!"

Shots were crackling closer. There was loud splashing as bodies seemed to fall into the swamp bayous. The Skipper wondered if the fighting men would be making toward the blaze of the pit where the corpse was being charred, its inexplicable virus of the green death being rendered harmless.

Cat Randolph did not speak again. But at the woman's words, he turned quickly, his hand coming from his clothing. He held a small leather bag, which had spilled open. Something dropped from it. Then Cat Randolph was beside the woman.

The Skipper heard him say, "Get back to the boat, Rama! I have the stones!"

The gleam of the steel-hooked hand disappeared with Randolph and the woman. A muffled motor sounded and a boat was going away. The Skipper strained against the loose strands of cotton line enmeshing his arms and legs. These were more difficult because of their looseness. The cord was the kind of a line which cannot be bitten by the sharp teeth of a shark, or of other fish near the Gulf.

The Skipper started rolling toward the fire.

SPIKE BRIGGS, Peter and Bumps were crouching at this moment on a small hummock of sand in the darkness. Their stream-lined speedboat was for the moment grounded in a shallow bayou. They had been making their way toward the glow of the fire made by Cat Randolph.

Bumps McCarthy had been employing a brilliant flashlight. Its beam had suddenly sliced into a pocket pool beside a bayou. A yell of surprise and anger had come from that pocket. The

The Skipper started rolling toward the fire.

giant figure of the long-armed, thick-lipped Sugar Cane was standing in a poled flatboat. Nearly a dozen white convicts were hunched behind Sugar Cane in the boat.

Shotguns appeared in their hands and when the first one exploded, the small particles of lead peppered Spike's body. They were too scattered to do other than produce a choice line of profanity. Spike and Bumps let go with automatics. Peter Doom had one of his big police revolvers.

Two convicts were tumbled from the flatboat. Sugar Cane then gave a mighty push on the boat's pole. Other guns smashed at the *Whirlwind* men as the flatboat was pushed through the swamp grass and out into the bayou.

Peter Doom timed a last shot perfectly. The bullet broke the skull of another convict, and he lay over the boat's gunwale. But Sugar Cane was getting the fugitives away. Spike and the others could not pursue. They turned again toward the glow of the fire where they hoped The Skipper might be a prisoner.

"If any of that gang of cons has got The Skipper, he's done for," groaned Peter Doom. "Funny, all this voodoo stuff, convicts armed and loose, and no pursuit. Damn it all! I told The Skipper we ought to sink that boat on the tip from old Champeau!"

AS the shooting died, The Skipper was rolling toward the fire in the cremation pit. His white teeth clicked together and he thrust his bound wrists into the nearest small blaze. The cotton cord caught and Cap's skin scorched. But the cord burned through and Cap freed his legs.

Coming to his feet, he whipped his right arm downward.

"Well, tie that one, will you?" he muttered. "Now just where in blue

hell does this Cat Randolph stand in all this?"

The exclamation was called forth by the blue automatic that had jumped from along his forearm into his right hand. There was another pistol holstered on his left arm. He had not been disarmed by the queer gray-eyed swamper with the coon-skin cap. Perhaps Cat Randolph had overlooked the weapons. But Cap was convinced the swamper was not one to overlook many items like that.

The Skipper could hear Spike and the others again plunging across the sucking quicksand pools and the hummocks. But as he started toward them, he halted abruptly. A green eye winked at him from the sand. Cap shook his head in perplexity. Too many things had taken on a greenish hue this night, but none had been so brilliant.

Then Cap said slowly, weighing the green eye in his hand, "I've seen some funny ones, but never a diamond of that shade. And it's the real thing. It came from that leather bag."

The Skipper's mind jumped to another item that had been in Andre Champeau's original appeal for him to come to Riverton. The words had been:

> My property is heavily mortgaged. I could have lifted it, but I did not wish to disclose a family fortune in jewels. It would not be good for many in the swamps, some of the Negroes to know. I have been disposing of some, one at a time. It was because of this that I told the little joke about Mata, my Negro woman, who is nearly a hundred years old. I made the white trash of the swamps believe she was a voodoo witch who could produce diamonds from her rites of the Feathered Green Serpent.

And here was indubitably a greenish diamond. Cat Randolph had it in his possession. The Creole woman had asked him if he had them. Then there had been others in that bag. Where might this new angle lead?

The Skipper recalled Cat Randolph's watchfulness on the wharf, his keen, curious scrutiny when Dale Champeau had brought her father's message. Cap pocketed the jewel, having not the slightest doubt but that this was one of the Champeau diamonds.

Could the green death, the apparent widespread effort in the city to arouse feeling against Champeau, have something to do with the family fortune?

BUMPS McCARTHY was one of the fastest movie cameramen of the newsreels. He never wasted time. Five minutes after he and the others had hailed the figure of The Skipper plunging through the swamp to meet them, they were back on the stream-lined boat and it was backing out of the sand toward the river.

Then Bumps reached into his shirt and pulled out a quickly developed film. He held it up and pulled it across a flashlight.

"The camera's eye was even better than your own, Skipper," stated Bumps. "There's a perfect flash of the voodoo woman's hands. If she's an old Negro crone, I'm a Chinaman."

"There's no reason to insult the Chinese," drawled Peter Doom, whose verbal regard for Bumps was always spiked.

The Skipper saw what Bumps meant. The voodoo woman's arms were well-rounded, sinuous and young. They reminded him of the lithe movement of the Creole woman who had joined Cat Randolph.

But all The Skipper said was: "It will be well to make the *Whirlwind* quickly. Our presence here is no longer much of a secret. I expect visitors soon."

The Skipper's judgment was perfect. Less than ten minutes after the streamlined boat was housed in the hold, a long motor boat sputtered across the river. It bore a small searchlight on its prow. The disc of the illumination played over the black and rusty plates of the ancient tanker.

"Nothin' but a damned old tramp oil can!" growled a voice in the boat. "I tell you the men we are looking for are traveling in some kind of a shiny cruiser! It's faster than hell, an' there ain't nothin' fast about that hunk of rust but the anchor!"

The searchlight flicked upward. It trapped a big, hairy face. It was the black-bearded countenance and the bared, gorilla chest of the *Whirlwind's* second mate, "Hurricane Dan" Belmont. But the second mate was wearing a master's uniform, and he bulked importantly. The Skipper and the others were concealed in the darkness of the wheelhouse where they could see and hear.

The launch was crowded with guards from the convict ship. They were armed with rifles. Two dripping-jowled bloodhounds were held on leashes.

"Hey, you, up there!" bawled a guard. "You seen any boats come this way?"

"Ain't been nary a ripple on the river over here!" boomed Hurricane Dan Belmont. "But what the hell an' all's the shootin' about in the swamps, an' that crazy singin' an' yellin'?"

"You heard that voodoo stuff, huh?" barked another voice.

THE SKIPPER saw the face and figure of a well-dressed man move to the prow of the launch. He held up a bright steel hook where his right hand once had been. His eyes glowed in the light.

"Well, you fellows on the river might as well know about it, so you won't do any fishin' up the bayous!" called the steel-hooked man. "That there singin' stuff was the cause of some convicts breakin' loose while most of the guards were down to Riverton! It's an old sorceress who came to the plantation of Andre Champeau nearly a hundred years ago! They say she's responsible for a plague that's hit the town!"

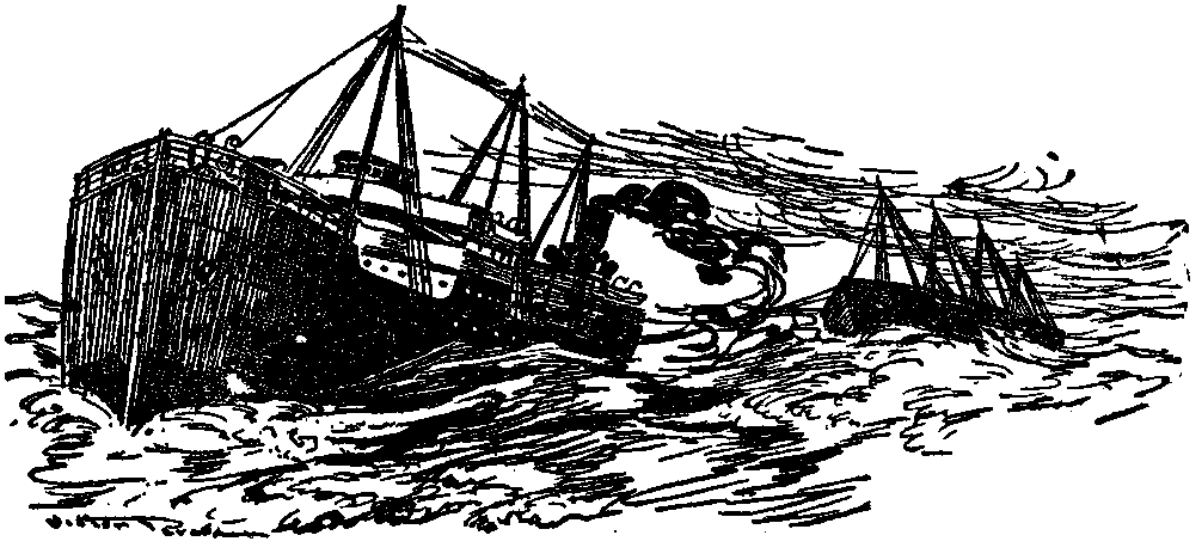
"Plague?" grunted Hurricane Dan, dumbly.

"Yeah, mister captain! An' if your boys take shore leave here while you're loadin', I wouldn't go prowlin' around! Tell the boys to hang out at the Swamp Club, an' they won't run into the plague! I'm runnin' the Swamp Club, an' I look out for sailors special! No rough stuff! Just have 'em say they're friends of Hooker Suggs! That's me!"

Hurricane Dan blessed him with a sailor's oath.

"An' maybe I'll be looking you up for a friendly swig myself, Mr. Suggs!" added the second mate.

The boat loaded with guards backed away. There was no further scrutiny. Apparently, this man known as "Hooker" Suggs and the convict guards were convinced the old tramp was what



it seemed to be, a filthy tanker in the river for oil.

A few minutes later, the deep baying of the bloodhounds sounded from across the river. The Skipper was adding up the night's events.

"Either triplets have been born with steel hands or that lubber who calls himself Hooker Suggs can come very close to being in three places at about the same time," mused The Skipper. "First, he's spying on the voodoo show. Then, he's in a boat with Cat Randolph. Next, he is trailing with the convict guards hunting escaped convicts. And he runs a club in Riverton."

"Which makes him a versatile mug," growled Peter Doom. "What's our next move, Skipper?"

"Turn in!" barked Cap Fury. "We may have a busy day ahead!"

But The Skipper did not turn in. For more than an hour, he was in one of the strangest laboratories afloat. This was set behind an amazing central cabin containing priceless furnishings. The plated walls were filled with chrome panels containing advanced devices for radio communication.

There were many other astounding features, to have been found in an old tramp ship.

The Skipper put in the hour working with gloved hands. He produced a dozen mixtures of chemicals. At last, one of these turned a spot on the back of his hand to a vivid green. He had injected barely a minim of the stuff. After that, The Skipper turned in.

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH UNDER MAGNOLIAS.

MORNING broke to find Riverton more than ever appalled by the plague of the green death. A score of new victims had been isolated in the barbed-wire enclosure of the public square under the magnolias. Adding to the grim horror was the removal of the many who had died during the night.

Jabbering colored convicts with chains clanking at their ankles were being employed for this gruesome task. They were frightened, filled with terror. But after a police gun had cracked once and a convict had rolled into the street filled with buckshot, the other chained men entered the barricade.

Commanded by the fat Chief Ulan, the police themselves maintained a respectful distance from the horror. The corpses of swampers, aristocrats and others were all piled alike in trucks. They were to be doused with oil and burned.

Broad-hatted Samuel Pound stood at the corner of the public square. He was talking with Chief Ulan.

"I tell you, suh, Yall Jutt and the others must stop this stirrin' up prejudice against my friend, Andre Champeau," said Samuel Pound. "As mayor of the town, I'm powerless to send outside to risk the lives of others in the swamps. But after the election, unless I'm mistaken, the State will have a new governor. Then we will get at this."

Neither Mayor Pound nor Chief Ulan observed the stocky figure of a man in greasy overalls, who might have been either an oil worker or a sailor from one of the tankers. This man's face was grimy, and he rolled with a drunken lurch when he walked. His features did not in the least resemble the square, fighting countenance of Captain John Fury.

Nevertheless, he was The Skipper. And in the same block was the tall Peter Doom, now clad in somber black with a round-brimmed hat that made him look more than ever like an undertaker. In fact, he was mistaken for a strange mortician who might have been attracted to the thriving city.

Bumps McCarthy was his own red-headed self, with a small camera concealed in his hat. He was wise enough

to know that pictures of the horror being enacted would hardly be permitted.

The Skipper was close enough to hear a sudden exclamation from Chief of Police Ulan.

"Damned if there isn't old Champeau himself! Ridin' in as proud as if nothing ever could happen!"

The Skipper slid along a building. He saw a strange equipage of any modern city round a corner into the square of the magnolias. It was a horse-drawn carriage with an ebony-colored driver. The driver himself was sitting straight and looking ahead. His hair was gray and his face was wrinkled.

Plainly the ancient colored man had long been a servant of the erect old man with the pointed beard and ruddy face sitting in the carriage.

Andre Champeau was patrician from toes to hair. He glanced neither to right nor left, as the carriage rolled past the hideous scene in the barbed-wire barricade. The lovely Dale Champeau sat beside him, but her own eyes were averted and just before the carriage stopped before a low, dingy building, she bowed her glossy black head into her hands.

THE SKIPPER glanced up as Champeau and his daughter alighted. He had not expected to see Champeau this morning. Cap had other business. He was seeking more information concerning the political control that had made possible the loose handling of parish convicts on the striped ship up the river.

Old Champeau said to the colored driver, "We will not be long, Jethrow. You will wait here. It would not be advisable to leave the carriage."

The advice was scarcely needed. Cap could see furtive movement along the street. Swampers and workers, a few others who had the mark of older residents, looked at the Champeau carriage and moved out of the block. Cap saw Mayor Samuel Pound take a quick step, but Andre Champeau bowed in his direction, and indicated with his hand that he had other business.

A swaying sign over the doorway of the dingy building bore a single name and designation. Cap had previously noted this. It had been one of his reasons for lingering near by. The sign read:

YALL JUTT, ATTORNEY AT LAW.

That was the sign under which Andre Champeau and his daughter passed to ascend a creaking stairway. The Skipper had seen others going and coming from the building which contained other offices. He flicked a signal to Bumps and Peter, then quickly trailed another man who had turned into the Yall Jutt stairway after the Champeaus.

But just as he entered, Cap's keen eyes were taking in all of the street. He noted the sudden gathering of small groups. Their faces were turned toward the old colored driver on the high seat of the carriage. The Skipper's thumb directed Peter and Bumps to keep watch on the servant.

THEN Cap saw the well-dressed man with the steel hook for a right hand walking alone into the block. Hooker Suggs appeared to be sauntering aimlessly, smoking a cigar. Mayor Samuel Pound hailed him.

"Mr. Suggs!" he boomed out. "I have been wanting a word with you! Unless conditions improve, I am afraid the Swamp Club must be closed along with other public places!"

The Skipper did not pause to hear more. The hallway above was narrow and ill-lighted. A door opened and closed. Cap moved swiftly, consulting a paper in his hand, as if looking for some one. The man between him and the Champeaus vanished into another office.

The small sign on the rickety door was not needed to halt Cap close to the panels. A harsh, twangy voice was speaking angrily. It was the same tone Cap had heard used by Mr. Jutt on the wharf.

"Yuh know yo' can fix them mortgages if yo' want to, Champeau! I ain't carryin' them any longer!"

Cap realized instinctively that while Mr. Jutt might be a lawyer, he must have sprung from a stratum of society far below that of the aristocratic Andre Champeau. And cold contempt for the lawyer was in Champeau's voice when he replied:

"Under circumstances that have arisen, Jutt, I shall continue to pay only the interest for the time," said the old Frenchman. "You have been making a pretty profit off that interest. So I have brought you another of the diamonds."

Mr. Jutt's reply twanged out.

"Not this time, Champeau! I can't handle them! You yourself started the story they come from that voodoo devil, Mata! They carry the green death!"

"That's a lie, and you know it, Jutt!" roared Andre Champeau. "I pay the interest, and you will accept it! You may have come up from the swamps, but you are too smart to believe that fairy tale about voodooism!"

"From the swamps, am I?" snarled Mr. Jutt. "Well, maybe I believe it an' maybe I don't, but there's plenty that does——"

The Skipper started to move away, a grim smile across his mouth. It might be that Mr. Jutt, the lawyer, knew a great deal of what was happening in the swamps above the city. Cap was nearing the stairway when a roar of angry voices, the crackle of shots rolled up from the street near the public square.

WHEN The Skipper vanished, Peter and Bumps observed that several citizens crossed the street rather than pass close to the Champeau carriage and the ancient, wrinkled Negro driver. Only Mayor Samuel Pound, walking with Hooker Suggs, came along the sidewalk. Mayor Pound nodded in a friendly fashion to the old Negro.

Bumps was at the moment operating the trick movie camera set into his hat. Its small spring was buzzing and the lens was pointed toward the convicts about their task of horror. Peter Doom's ears were among the keenest. Something hissed suddenly. It seemed to have no special direction. Peter sprang to the mouth of a near-by alley. He saw the back of a man who was running away, but there seemed no reason for it.

Peter walked back to the sidewalk. Samuel Pound and Hooker Suggs had reached the corner below. Chief Ulan, with three of his straw-hatted policemen, was standing across the street from the Champeau equipage. It seemed the police chief was keeping a friendly and watchful eye upon the old driver.

A drab woman with a snuff stick protruding from a stained mouth came out of a store with two children dragging at her skirts. She was a typical swamper's wife. Her feet shuffled as if she could not lift them. She came from "back yonder," where the hookworm thrives.

Evidently, the drab woman had no fear of the Champeau carriage. She walked close to it. Her head turned sideways and she glanced up at the Negro driver. Then she screamed. Screamed shrilly.

"He's got it! Land o' time! Somebody save us! Look! Look!"

For five seconds, she seemed paralyzed, staring at the driver. Then she swooped the two children under her arms. Still screaming madly, she started dragging her small brood away.

The erect Negro driver had jumped as if he were stung. As if the woman's scream had sickened him, his hands slowly dropped the reins of the horses. They arched their necks and started

prancing. The old Negro started slipping slowly from the seat.

Then he cried out, "Save me, Lawd!"

As he came to the sidewalk, he was on his feet. Peter and Bumps saw his wrinkled face. It was hideously twisted, the dark skin taking on the hue of green chalk. The old man's eyes rolled until only the white balls were visible.

Police Chief Ulan started across the street, yelling, "The green death! Stop him! Watch the horses!"

The three straw-hatted policemen were armed with shotguns. The driver was staggering along the sidewalk. Perhaps in the throes of sudden agony, he thought but to reach his master, Andre Champeau. He was one of that vanishing class of family retainers who put all their faith in the family itself.

"Stop, you damned fool!" shouted Chief Ulan. "Hey! Maybe the horses are infected!"

ONE of the policemen was plainly scared. The shotgun jerked up in his hands. The freed horses reared, then came back to all four feet. Perhaps they would have dashed away. The shotgun roared, blasting shot into one animal's eyes. The horse plunged and fell down.

The other horse splintered the carriage front with his heels and ripped himself loose from the harness. He galloped madly toward the enclosure under the magnolias, lunging blindly into the strands of barbed wire.

The ancient driver perhaps could not hear. He did not heed the command of Chief Ulan to stop. His wrinkled, old hands were groping before him as he tried to reach the stairway to Yall Jutt's office. Then Chief Ulan's angered voice rapped out.

"Shoot him down! He'll spread the plague!"

"Fo' de Lawd's sake!" cried out the old Negro. "Ah nebbah——"

Two shotguns blasted. The hat fell off the old man's kinky white hair. The top of his head seemed to go with it. He fell in the middle of the sidewalk. A crowd was surging around the corner. A policeman was rolling an empty oil barrel.

"Burn him where he is!" shouted Chief Ulan. "We've got to stop this now!"

Two oil barrels appeared. They were touched off and oily smoke and flame quickly engulfed the rigid body on the sidewalk.

Then it was that old Andre Champeau emerged from the doorway of the Yall Jutt building with the beautiful Dale beside him. A piercing scream of grief and pain came from the girl's suddenly stiffened lips as her luminous eyes took in the appalling scene.

Andre Champeau thrust his daughter back into the doorway. The Skipper had emerged and halted, waiting. Champeau's right hand pulled a revolver from inside his coat.

"You low-down murderers!" roared Andre Champeau. "Damn you! I've had enough of this, and I'll end it——"

Perhaps the maddened Frenchman would have selected Chief Ulan as the first target for his revolver. The Skipper no doubt saved Chief Ulan's life.

But the crowd had attained the size of a mob. An angry, cursing mob.

"Get the Champeaus! Burn them, too! They brought the green death!"

Voices of swampers. Voices of men. Voices of women. All the frenzy of fear that destroys all reason rang through the street. The men closest to the Champeaus surged toward them.

Champeau's burst of anger seemed to have weakened him. Cap Fury had pulled the revolver from his hand. He thrust the man and the girl back into the stairway from which they had come. Peter and Bumps were striding toward him.

The Skipper might have used the revolver, but he merely clubbed it in his

hand. The first burly man at the head of the mob caught up a piece of pipe. He hurled this in the direction of the Champeaus.

"Kill them all! Push them into the fire!"

THERE were perhaps ten men across the front line of the crazed mob. The Skipper's flying stride carried him to the man who had thrown the pipe. The butt of the revolver slashed out and the man went down. Then Cap deliberately dropped the gun.

Right and left, right and left. The salt-hardened fists drove into the nearest faces. Jaw bones crunched and men went down. Knuckles hammered at Cap's rolling head; they cut his face and blood ran into his eyes. Perhaps it was then he became a pivoting, slashing machine.

Peter Doom and Bumps took the head of the mob from two sides. It was incredible. There were seasoned fighters in that crowd, but three men of the rough-and-ready *Whirlwind* crew were herding them, pounding them off their feet, handing them a brand of fighting to which there were no rules.

Peter's long arms flailed out in sweeping haymakers. Bumps held his red head low and worked on their stomachs. His own face turned to a bloody pulp, but the cameraman had weight and punch.

Chief Ulan was shouting, "Stop it! Get those men! We'll have no lynchings here!"

Then half a dozen shotgun muzzles were jabbing into bodies. One was pushed into The Skipper's back. He twisted sideways and removed it with a heel that smashed upward and nearly unjointed the surprised copper's elbow.

But by this time, the leaders of the mob had taken such a sudden hard-fisted beating that all the crowd had swept back. The Skipper, Peter and Bumps backed to a wall, blood streaming from their faces. Chief Ulan stood in front of them as other policemen got the crowd under control.

But more persons were pouring into the street. It was then that a car rolled to the curb. Samuel Pound was standing on the running board, waving his broad hat.

"Fellow citizens!" he shouted in a voice that hushed all other sound. "You are making a great mistake! Get back, all of you! I am the mayor! Andre Champeau is my friend!"

The chauffeur driving the car was crossing the sidewalk.

"Mayor Pound wants you to take his car!" he said to the Champeaus. "We'll get you out of this!"

CHAPTER V.

SWAMP CLUB MURDER.

DALE CHAMPEAU persuaded her shaken father to get into Samuel Pound's car. It rolled away. But the mob was yelling again.

"Get the witch! Find Mata and burn her! She brought the green death! Run the Champeaus out of town!"

Mayor Samuel Pound walked over to Chief Ulan, wiping sweat from his red face and smoothing his goatee beard. He looked at The Skipper, Peter and Bumps.

"Whoever these men are, chief, you will release them," said Samuel Pound. "You're strangers here, I see. We can't have street brawls, but I commend you for saving my friend, Andre Champeau."

Chief Ulan muttered, but the shotguns were lowered. The chief had turned to Samuel Pound. None saw the dexterous movement of Cap Fury. He was close beside the blazing barrels. The legs of the partly burned old colored man stuck out. The Skipper had seen something. When he came erect, he had a small object in his hand that he juggled into a pocket.

Chief Ulan said, "Maybe I was wrong about you three fellows, but if I catch you fighting again, you'll get jail. We don't stand for it in this town."

"Some one had to stop your sweet, little mob," said The Skipper, calmly.

Chief Ulan's small eyes glittered.

"There's only one boss of the cops, and law and order in Riverton, whoever you are!" he gritted. "If you fellows come off a ship, take my advice and get back to it! If you don't, I'll have to lock you up for your own protection! You don't know this town, and folks are getting ugly!"

"Take the chief's advice and go back to your ship," advised Samuel Pound. "I can see you are sailors. We are placing a ban on strangers for their own good."

"And that means," snapped Chief Ulan, "to get out of Riverton and stay out! We'll handle our own troubles!"

Peter let out an oath, but The Skipper grinned at the irate chief through bruised and bloody lips.

"My friends and myself are returning to our ship to clean up," said Cap softly. "But no living man has ever told me to stay out of any town and made it stick."

THE SKIPPER turned and rolled away with Peter and Bumps beside him. He could tell that Mayor Pound and Chief Ulan were staring after him, and that they were talking rapidly.

And as they swung along toward the river front, leaving the horrors of the square of the magnolias, many others were talking together. All business seemed to have come to a standstill. The Skipper saw the hard face of Yall Jutt, the lawyer, in the middle of a street group.

The word, "To-night!" was being passed around. The participation of Cap and his companions in blocking the mob attempt apparently was forgotten. But there was an increasing wave of mob spirit. One man shouted there was to be a mass meeting to-night. The name of Mata, the witch, was on every tongue.

"Then we'll burn the Champeau place and run them out!" shrilled the voice of a crazed woman.

She herself was a swamper, with the inevitable, blackened snuff stick protruding from her mouth. This woman was in the group around Yall Jutt.

"Hell, Skipper!" complained Peter Doom. "I'm thinking we had best reach Champeau and persuade him to get out! Our crew can't take on a whole city, and if this keeps up all day, by to-night we'd have the whole damned town to lick!"

The Skipper eased the heel of a hand across one half-closed eye.

"Whole damned towns have been licked before, and they can be licked again, Peter," he observed. "But for the present, I believe our next port of call will be the Swamp Club."

CAP FURY and his companions did not go immediately to the Swamp Club. In fact, darkness was misting the gray reaches of the untamed swamps above the town when The Skipper responded to an invitation that had been given Hurricane Dan Belmont by Hooker Suggs.

In the meantime, The Skipper was busy in his laboratory during the afternoon. The small green patch of skin caused by a chemical mixture was still on the back of his hand. But now he was analyzing another substance.

In this, he employed the greatest of care. For Cap Fury believed he had come close to the source of the green death. So it was with his face tightly masked, and his hands gloved, that he made the most minute and careful tests. He said nothing of this to the others.

Now the Swamp Club was a well-named café. It was a low, thatched building set upon pilings extending from back of a levee front on the river over

the black muck of the swamp. A narrow bayou passed closely behind it.

The Skipper was a different figure than in the morning as he shouldered his way through the crowd along the levee. The tops of his great sea boots flapped. A rusty lock of hair strayed over his forehead. He and the others had removed nearly all signs of the morning battle.

None would have identified Cap Fury as the man who had led in the defense of the Champeaus. Bumps and Peter kept to themselves. Spike Briggs and big Hurricane Dan Belmont were with the captain when they entered the club.

Drinking was heavy in the Swamp Club. The long room with a bar along its length was crowded. There was an unholy grin of delight upon the ugly, scarred face of Spike Briggs, the first mate.

"Sweet Davy Jones!" he said out of the corner of his mouth. "It's some mess of swabs! Maybe we'll get some action!"

"That is possible," smiled Cap Fury, as the three tough officers of the *Whirlwind* eased themselves to a table at one end of the bar.

Hooker Suggs was standing with his steel arm resting on the mahogany. He recognized Hurricane Dan and shoved through the many tough-looking citizens. He noted that Hurricane Dan was wearing a captain's uniform.

"The best in the house for you boys!" exclaimed Hooker, genially. "Glad to see you took me up, captain!"

Hurricane Dan growled in his chest and ordered the drinks.

Hooker said, "You won't be interested in what's going on, but the town boys are all worked up over the green plague! They are arming themselves, and they say they are going after the voodoo woman, Mata! Want to bring her into the public square alive and stage a little celebration! I would sit tight, captain, if anything starts!"

"I always sit tight!" grunted Hurricane Dan.

Hooker Suggs went back and rested his bright steel hand on the bar. He was a good-looking man and sported a small diamond in his shirt front. The majority in the room were well liquored.

A SMALL knot of the toughest characters seemed to have collected near the middle of the bar. A scar-faced man with a mop of albino hair was haranguing them through thick lips.

Hurricane Dan said, "That swab's one of the guards that was in the boat last night, Skipper."

Cap Fury was listening to the guard's words. The man was drunk and ugly.

"She's been playin' hell with the cons on the ship!" he proclaimed. "This damned witch has got her voodoo sign on some of the other guards, an' that's the way she works it! Gits the cons to them doin's, an' that's where she 'flicts 'em with the green death!

"Thing we've gotta do is git this voodoo hell-cat an' burn her in a barrel! Then we've gotta run out them Champeaus! Maybe him an' his kind run this town in the old days, but this ain't the old days! I know where we can grab Mata and——"

The guard suddenly ceased talking. The Skipper saw Cat Randolph appear in the doorway and ease himself through the drunken crowd. The swamper in his coon-skin cap seemed to move with the ease and grace of one of his own wild cats.

But it was the broad-hatted figure of Mayor Samuel Pound looming up that had halted the guard's speech.

"Perhaps it's all right to seize Mata, as you say, Willows!" boomed out the oratorical voice. "I'm for you, boys, when it comes to doing anything that may whip this thing that's got us! But we cannot have any lynching or burning! If Mata is posing as a voodoo witch,

she must have a regular trial, understand that!"

Some of the crowd muttered. The convict guard said, "Trial, hell? Mayor, what could be proved? I say—burn her!"

Samuel Pound mopped perspiration from his forehead.

"You boys want a governor of the State who hails from our town, don't you?" he said.

There was an instant chorus, drunken and maudlin, but emphatic.

"Sure! Sure, Sam! We're wantin' you for governor, so's we can get what's comin' to Riverton!"

"Right!" boomed Samuel Pound. "But you won't get your governor if there's a lynching and burning while I'm mayor! We have had to do certain things against the green plague, but everything has been right and legal! So if Mata is taken, and is brought before Judge Thatcher——"

"That's right, boys!" sang out Hooker Suggs, suddenly. "Thatcher don't believe in letting the starched shirts run the town! I heard him say he knew the Champeau woman was a voodoo witch! That would make it as it should be!"

Samuel Pound beamed one of his best political smiles.

IN The Skipper's mind, the events of the green death had become an involved puzzle. He had no belief whatever in the sorcery of a voodoo witch, even if he had not known the origin of the considerably cock-eyed story of Mata, the Champeau Negro crone.

He sorted over those who had been in the forefront of the mob prejudiced against the Champeaus and the woman Mata. There was Yall Jutt?

The Skipper would have been amazed to know that the swamper lawyer had aspired to the love of the beautiful and patrician Dale Champeau. But Mr. Jutt was not of the class to which the Champeaus belonged by right, tradition and breeding.

Still, there were others who wanted the lovely Dale Champeau. Even Samuel Pound, mayor and avowed candidate for governor, had cast his eyes in the girl's direction.

The Skipper looked at Hooker Suggs with his gleaming right hand that was no less than a formidable weapon. He considered what he had seen in the swamp above the city, and that brought him to Cat Randolph, who was lounging across the bar, saying nothing, but slowly imbibing a drink.

The attitude of the police force, of Chief Ulan, seemed to Cap to be definitely against the Champeaus. Then there was the woman in the swamp, the Creole who had gone away with Cat Randolph.

Some one among these must have some reason for unalterable hatred of the Champeaus, or perhaps of the patrician quality they represented in a city that had become a conglomeration of swamp ignorance, tough labor and aristocrats who saw their once quiet community given over to people whom they must regard as invaders.

Could it be possible that some one among the "quality folks" had inspired the green plague as a means of ridding the city of others through fear?

Samuel Pound had smiled his political beam. Now he said, "The drinks are on me, fellows. And here's to your next governor!"

At that, one of the Swamp Club assistants made an announcement.

"Rama, Rama of the Rhumba," he said, "would do a number."

Cap's face was a blank mask as he saw the sinuous dancing girl come onto the little platform. She was a veil dancer, and one mighty thin veil at that. Her graceful, pantherish figure swayed and contorted to the music of plucked banjo strings.

Across the room, Bumps McCarthy

was signaling The Skipper with his eyes, and waving plump hands. The Skipper nodded. Yes, Rama could be no other than the woman of the swamps. The woman whom The Skipper had seen join Cat Randolph.

IN the rush of drinking on Samuel Pound, Cat Randolph slid along the bar. The Skipper did not miss the warm side smile that came from Rama as her black eyes watched the swamper in the coon-skin cap.

"By all the purple hells!" rumbled Peter Doom to Bumps. "That dame is gone on the cat man, and they would make a swell team!"

Cat Randolph edged close to Hooker Suggs. He pulled a little sack from his shirt. Cap was reading their lips. Cat Randolph placed a small, gleaming stone on the bar, pushed it toward Hooker Suggs.

Hooker said, "How much?"

Cat Randolph said, "A hundred."

The stone was a small diamond. Hooker fingered bills from his pocket. He handed these to Cat Randolph. He picked up the stone in his good left hand. The diamond slipped, rolled across the bar.

The thick-lipped convict guard stared at it. Suddenly, he was yelling:

"Look! The damned catter! He's got one of the Mata diamonds!"

Cat Randolph scarcely moved, but his cold, gray eyes took in the big convict guard.

"Get him, boys!" shouted the guard. "See if the damned catter's got more of 'em! He lives in the muck, an' I've heard Mata's his friend!"

The guard's friends were drunk and ugly. Hoarse oaths dripped from their lips as they rushed upon Cat Randolph. The thick-lipped guard was in the lead. He had picked up a whisky bottle. The weapon swung over his head and started down.

The Skipper's boots gripped the floor and he was on the verge of catapulting himself across the room. Then he settled back.

One of Randolph's own swamp cats could not have struck quicker or with more disastrous effect. A fist like a driven bolt hit the bottle in mid-air and smashed it solidly against the ugly guard's forehead.

As flesh divided and a profane squawk came from the bigger man's lips, Cat Randolph half doubled and shot up. No more amazing exhibition was ever given. The guard was borne aloft on Randolph's sinewy hands.

Blood flying from his face, oaths spewing from his lips, the big man spun in the air. Cat Randolph's body whirled under him twice. Then the guard was released. He went crashing over the bar, shattering glasses and bottles under the mirror.

"Get him! Lynch the swamper! He's Mata's friend!"

The convict guard's friends hit the bar in a mass where Cat Randolph had been. But the man in the coon-skin cap had somehow slithered through the crowd. There was a cool, mocking laugh. He was beside The Skipper's table. He was looking at Cap Fury.

"So you don't believe my warning to keep out of this thing," he said quietly. "Well, you're free and white, and I gave you a chance."

SPIKE BRIGGS was rearing to his feet belligerently, but the surprising Cat Randolph was gone through the nearest door. The Skipper saw Rama slip from the platform, following. Cap was on the verge of springing after them, when a different voice carried through the crash of bodies and oaths near the bar.

A tall, elderly man with a finely cut face was the speaker. He had just entered, and he was stone sober. Evidently, he came from one of the shuttered old houses.

"Samuel Pound!" he said crisply.

"Can you not stop these fools? None but drunken rowdies would accuse Andre Champeau! The man who gave Champeauville, or Riverton as you call it, its parks, the public square, the library!"

The elderly aristocrat was backed up to the bar facing the others. None could have said where the vicious, brittle snap originated. There was a slight hissing. Hooker Suggs was pushing his way toward Mayor Samuel Pound, his steel hook waving a path through the crowd. Samuel Pound himself suddenly cried out, "Quiet, all of you! All should go home and sleep it off! Whisky has been talking——"

The words were cut off by a concerted, roaring chorus of fear. Men were jamming back, slugging their friends to get away from the bar.

The elderly aristocrat who had spoken for Andre Champeau was swaying on his feet, his mouth beginning to gape open. In the glare of the bar lights the man's face was swiftly turning green. He put a hand out to feel, as if he were blinded.

"The green death! He's brought it to us!"

Clamorous, ribald oaths of terror slavered from the lips of drunken men. Bodies jammed in three street doors and fists slugged into bloody faces. A door snapped open at the end of the bar. Through it, the gray, ghostly trees of the swamp could be seen. It was the door through which the Creole girl Rama had gone to follow Cat Randolph.

One wicked explosion cracked in the opening door. The Skipper saw a bullet hole appear almost in the middle of the forehead of the elderly aristocrat weaving at the bar. There was no blood, but the green face went down and the body fell to the floor where space suddenly had been cleared.

The door slapped shut. But The Skipper was already going over his table. Spike and Hurricane Dan were at his shoulders, emitting joyful profanity as their fists started clearing a way across the room. Peter Doom's tall figure also was moving. His long arms and knobbed fists piled up men with the effect of plowing fury.

CHAPTER VI.

A JUDGE FOR A WITCH.

THE SKIPPER had seen faces through the door from which the murder shot had ended, perhaps mercifully, the life of the aristocrat who had been so swiftly afflicted with the green plague. He had seen fragments of chains clanking on men's ankles, the long-armed convict, Sugar Cane, with a gun in his hand.

Before the door had closed, Cap realized there was a broad platform outside that door. The platform projected on piling over the narrow, deep bayou. Perhaps Cat Randolph had his boat waiting out there when he vanished. It seemed almost as if the cat man might have known the fugitive convicts were lurking there in the darkness, prepared for murder.

Possibly the flight of Cat Randolph had been a signal for Sugar Cane and his escaped killers?

Anyway, the murder shot had come from out there. The Skipper's hard shoulders struck the door, smashing its lock and flinging it open.

The immense Sugar Cane was crouched, gun still smoking. Cap sprang directly upon him, his incredibly fast hands fastening upon the mulatto's thick wrists. Cap bowed his body and as another convict slashed at his head with a shotgun barrel, he heaved Sugar Cane high over his head. The mulatto's face collected splinters from the pine-wood platform.

The Skipper ducked another swinging shotgun and the weapon thundered. Shot patterned the wall above Cap as he timed a blow to a bearded convict's chin. The

man went off the platform into the black water a few feet below.

Spike, Hurricane Dan and Peter Doom were causing the light platform to sway with their own pounding attack. Peter's big revolver spat fire twice, and each time there was one less of the fugitives. The undersized Spike, with his buzz-saw fists, unhesitatingly took on three men who outweighed him by hundreds of pounds.

Cap saw the doorway suddenly filled. This new fight had abruptly taken away some of the fear of the green death. Roaring, cursing drunkards came pouring onto the platform. The Skipper piled the first three at his knees, aware that the hard flesh of his knuckles was split to the bone.

But the mass was too great for the four fighting men of the *Whirlwind*. The Skipper swung on one more bobbing face, and the face became a disappearing black spot. That was because a hard weapon had descended upon The Skipper's rusty hair.

Less than a minute later, it was all over. Peter Doom alone was conscious, but gripped by iron hands. Chief of Police Ulan's fat face appeared in the door. His small eyes took in the men of the *Whirlwind* crew. He did not seem to notice that a flatboat was being poled away into the swamp, bearing eight or ten convicts with broken chains on their ankles.

Chief Ulan could speak only to Peter Doom.

"You were told to get out of Riverton and stay out!" he snapped. "I am the law and order in this town! You'll know now what it is to walk a levee with an iron spike between your ankles!"

CHIEF ULAN might have been law and order, but it did not seem so to Bumps McCarthy. The red-headed cameraman had failed to get into the thick of the fight outside the door. A huge swamper, or worker, had got to him first. Bumps had been cleanly knocked out.

But he was near a street door and coming out of the fog when he saw Chief Ulan's policemen bringing The Skipper and his companions off the bayou platform. Bumps wisely decided a rescue committee of one was highly impractical.

Bumps thought to get word to the *Whirlwind* crew as quickly as possible. He grinned with relish. The Skipper might be in a tight fix, but when that crew of tough hearties found it out, they would begin taking the town apart.

But a few minutes later, Bumps was not so sure. He was caught up and carried along by a pressing, roaring mob outside. The convict guard smashed by Cat Randolph was again leading.

This was one of the very few times that Bumps McCarthy became too sick to start taking a film of what was happening. Two men held the pole of a boat hook. The steel was snagged into the clothes of the murdered man with the green face.

Hoots and yells were the aristocrat's funeral march as his body was dragged through the street, followed by the mob. Bumps was pushed along. He did not resist. He suddenly had no desire to attract any undue attention to himself.

Oil barrels were blazing in the public square under the perfumed magnolias. The sweet odor became a terrible smell of death. The dragged body of the man who had defended Andre Champeau was cast into the flames.

Then it was that the mob of thousands went crazy. Guns appeared on every side. Shooting and mad yelling filled the one-time peaceful square. The few victims of the green death inside the barbed-wire stockade were soon suffering no longer. Whistling lead struck others as the crazed mob cross-fired and some were hit by bullets of their friends.

Bumps at last was given an opportunity to slip away. He made the en-

trance to the first alley and was about to take that way back to the river. A cold, hard voice spoke beside him:

"This way, and come with your hands in the air!"

Bumps pivoted. He was facing the fat-faced Chief Ulan. There was no mistaking the police chief's anger or the leveled revolver in his hand. Bracelets clicked onto the cameraman's wrists.

Cap sprang directly upon him, his incredibly fast hands fastening upon Sugar Cane's thick wrists.

SOME of the hideous effect of the night's orgy had been removed when a sickly sun again struggled up out of the swamp. There was an early-morning court in Riverton, a sunrise court.

The man who had been called from bed to preside was a sallow, malarial specimen of the Mississippi delta region. Tall and bony, his face was of a yellowish cast. He took a pill from a box every few minutes and swallowed it. Sweat popped out after each pill, but soon the man was shivering again with the chill of ague.

And this fever-racked man was

Judge Thatcher, whose sentence perhaps depended upon whether he was in a fever or a chill at the moment. He had none of the calm that should have stayed a judge. His pale eyes rolled, darting about the room.

Chief Ulan came and stood before The Skipper, Peter, Spike and Bumps McCarthy. A strange thing had happened. Hurricane Dan had been wearing the uniform of a ship captain. It might have been a word from Hooker Suggs, but the dazed Hurricane Dan had been released and not held for the court of Judge Thatcher.

Now Hurricane Dan was not always a quick thinker, but at the moment this sunrise court was in session, he was back aboard the old *Whirlwind*. And just before he had been released, Hurricane Dan had muttered a quick message into the twisted ear of Chief Mate Spike

Briggs. That message was to bear fruit within a quick hour of tragedy.

When he was not swallowing pills, the sallow Judge Thatcher had a quid of snuff under his long lower lip. He glared balefully at the prisoners. Peter Doom said to The Skipper, "Kangaroo court. It's all over but the time we get up the river."

Chief Ulan said to the court, "These men, Judge Thatcher, cannot be directly connected with a perhaps justified shooting last night at the Swamp Club, but they have twice resisted arrest, been guilty of felonious assault and have refused to stay out of the city."

"Six months on the river chain gang!" snapped Judge Thatcher, taking another pill.

"Well, I'll be teetotally damned!" roared Peter Doom. "Now that's what I call getting action! If we had a few New York courts——"

"Yo' all ain't had a chance," said a hard voice beside them. "Yo' should have demanded an attorney. I will insist upon representing you before the co't!"

THE SKIPPER'S intense blue eyes pierced Yall Jutt. The tight-mouthed lawyer who had come up from the swamps was standing there, rubbing his hands.

"It's kind of you, Mr. Jutt," said The Skipper. "But I think we will take our chances."

"What's that? What's that?" snapped Judge Thatcher. "Mr. Jutt, you will represent the defendants! Your fee will be charged as usual!"

Captain Fury came to his feet, the tops of his boots flapping.

"Is the law always so quick and arbitrary in your court, Judge Thatcher?" he said, mildly. "We do not accept Mr. Jutt, and we will make our own defense."

Judge Thatcher rolled snuff under his lip.

"You will have an additional three months on the chain gang for contempt of this court!" he barked. "Sit down!"

Peter pulled at Cap's coat.

"By my sacred aunt!" he exploded. "In another minute, we'll be given life!"

"Remove the prisoners!" snapped Judge Thatcher. "Bring on that other case!"

But the prisoners were not removed before the other case came on. It arrived in court accompanied by the hooting of a crowd outside the one-room court which occupied a small building of but one story. Chief Ulan's policemen hastily shoved The Skipper and his men into seats at one side. Spike and Bumps were handcuffed together.

The ancient Negro woman being roughly shoved up the aisle from the street door had to be supported by two deputies. Her sunken old eyes peered about, and her bare hands and arms were shaking. They were hardly more than bones with the skin dried upon them.

"Lynch her! She's a voodoo witch! Burn her! Bring her out!"

Cries came from the street door. Chief Ulan had a score of policemen. Mayor Samuel Pound came stalking up the aisle. He issued an order. Chief Ulan nodded and barked out a command.

"Clear all of the street outside!" he directed. "We will not tolerate a lynching! Law and order must prevail! The prisoner gets a fair trial!"

"By all the holies!" gritted The Skipper. "A fair trial, he says!"

YALL JUTT apparently was a versatile lawyer. He stood before Judge Thatcher.

"As city prosecutor," he said, "I am about to present evidence proving that this Negro woman, known as Mata, is a voodoo witch, and as such is responsible for the green plague which has caused many deaths."

Peter Doom's black eyes stared in unbelief.

"One minute he's a defense attorney, now he's the prosecutor," he muttered.

Judge Thatcher took a pill and sweat came onto his sallow face.

Thereupon, The Skipper and his men listened to the most amazing interpretation of law they had ever heard. Yall Jutt turned upon the bent, old Negro crone. It was plainly evident the woman was too old to understand anything transpiring. Her toothless mouth mumbled.

Mr. Jutt snapped out an accusing question.

"Mata, Andre Champeau says you make green diamonds?"

The old woman's thin, skeleton fingers twisted. Her words were indistinct and it was evident the question had made no impression.

Mr. Jutt called out a name and said it was his first witness. A lanky swamper with a snuff-stained beard got up.

"You have seen this woman Mata making voodoo in the swamp near the convict ship?" said Mr. Jutt.

"Reckon that mought be so," muttered the swamper.

"That will be all," said Mr. Jutt pleasantly, and called another name.

He had half a dozen witnesses in all. He put words in their mouths, and the dull-eyed swampers admitted they "guessed it mought be so." The first tall swamp angel to testify stood by with a vacant grin on his face.

Suddenly, Judge Thatcher said, "That is enough, Mr. Jutt. It is useless to take up the time of this court with further testimony. I myself have heard Andre Champeau say this woman is a voodoo sorceress. I am left no recourse under the law but to condemn her to be hanged. She has——"

Mayor Samuel Pound arose and interrupted.

"But, Judge Thatcher!" he boomed out. "It would seem to me that some opportunity for defense should be afforded! We have heard but one side of this case, suh! As the mayor and a man who hopes to become governor, I would——"

"You all, put up your hands!" came a crisp, clear contralto voice. "Murderers! I would kill all of you! Get away, you all, from Mata!"

THE SKIPPER grew tense. The lovely, oval face of Dale Champeau appeared in the open window at one side of the judge's bench. Framed by her black hair, her eyes were flaming. The girl was holding an automatic shotgun leveled at the group of deputies, Yall Jutt and others close to Mata.

"Free her, I say, before I start shootin'!" snapped the girl. "Men like you are better dead! Dragging poor, old Mata from her cabin! Mata, who never did any harm to any one! Get away from her!"

A policeman made a quick move toward his revolver. The shotgun in the window belched and the copper's arm was flung around by the blast of buckshot. He fell to the floor.

At that instant, the street door snapped open. The tall figure of Cat Randolph strode up the aisle. His voice was as cold as his eyes.

"I'm thinkin' you'll be smart to do as Miss Champeau says!"

The Skipper saw Hooker Suggs with his steel hook waving in the air. There were half a dozen men with Hooker, and they were streaming into the aisle.

The blazing eyes of the girl behind the shotgun in the window, the policeman writhing on the floor with his shattered arm, were enough to hold those in the courtroom spellbound for the moment. Cat Randolph went straight to the old Negro woman. A thick-necked deputy made a sudden move and Randolph's fist flashed across his chin. It was as if a cat had struck with a lightning paw, and the deputy went off his heels.

Cat Randolph swung the thin body of Mata into his arms, turned and started toward the street door. At that instant, Dale Champeau disappeared from the window. Immediately, there was a surging uproar in the court.

Fortunately for Cat Randolph, all eyes had been on that window. And as policemen and others were released from the threat, their first movements were confused. Randolph had almost reached the door with Mata in his arms.

Then The Skipper saw Hooker Suggs and the men with him suddenly block the way.

"It's our ticket now!" suddenly rapped The Skipper. "Come on!"

Steel handcuffs were on Cap and Peter Doom. Spike and Bumps were linked together. Instead of hampering them, the heavy steel bracelets were instantly converted into swinging, deadly weapons. The Skipper had a grim smile as his linked wrists took one telling swipe at the fat face of Police Chief Ulan and removed a section of his front teeth.

Cap regretted only that he had no chance to reach the ague-ridden Judge Thatcher. But the court had considered caution a great virtue. He had crawled under the table that served him as a bench.

Some had centered upon Cat Randolph and Mata. They were unprepared for the whirling cyclone in the shape of four handcuffed men that slashed a pathway through policemen and spectators alike. Cap heard Samuel Pound roaring.

"Listen to me! I am the mayor!"

But none seemed to give a special damn who was the mayor.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE BIG RIVER.

NEAR the back of the courtroom, there was a sudden brittle snap, a slow hissing. It must have come from some one in the surging crowd. Perhaps whoever controlled the green death had intended it for Cat Randolph, for a man close to him suddenly whirled on his heels and had his mouth gaping as if he could not get air.

"The green death!" shrieked a woman who had been in the back of the courtroom.

The Skipper and his men had formed a wedge that was cutting its way with swinging handcuffs down the aisle. Cap saw the latest victim of the green plague fall to the floor as there was a quick scattering away from him.

Cat Randolph never paused in his stride. The Skipper was getting to one side.

"Keep going, Peter!" he rapped out. "Spike, Bumps, help the man with the coon-skin cap!"

The Skipper himself made a swift movement. He bent quickly over the writhing victim of the green death. Peter and the others rammed the wedge of their flying fists through until they were at the heels of Cat Randolph.

The Skipper flicked a thumb and finger across the neck of the green-plague victim, was straightening up. Then behind him, a gleaming steel hook descended in a smashing blow.

"Take him, Chief Ulan!" snarled the voice of Hooker Suggs. "I'm beginning to think he may be helpin' this green-death thing along!"

The Skipper rolled over, not hearing the words. Two of Chief Ulan's coppers fastened onto his arms, and one batted him over the head just to make sure. They had seen The Skipper in action before.

Spike, Bumps and Peter were fighting shoulder to shoulder. They were in a swirling tangle of fists as they came into the street and had no time to miss The Skipper. Outside, they heard shouting, and saw a mob pushing against a line of policemen with shotguns. Apparently, the coppers outside had not learned what had happened in the courtroom.

They were trying to obey the order to keep the street clear. Peter Doom saw Dale Champeau sliding under the wheel of an open car. Cat Randolph sprang across the sidewalk, went into the seat with old Mata still in his arms. Mata's thin arms waved. Perhaps she was too old to understand anything that was happening.

Dale Champeau's voice soothed her. The girl patted her shoulder as the car started. The mob was yelling now. They had seen. They came pouring through the thin line of police. Peter Doom was unarmed, but as the open car started to move, he made for it.

Peter made the running board, attempted to hook his handcuffed hands onto some hold.

"Get off! Get away!" screamed Dale Champeau.

SHE released the wheel to whip up the shotgun beside her. Peter saw Cat Randolph attempt to seize her arm, but the weapon exploded so close to Peter's face that he was sure his eyes had been blown out. Powder burned off some of his hair as he released his hold and turned over in the street. He was in no condition to resist the two policemen who pounced upon him with both knees.

At the moment Peter again found himself in the hands of Riverton's own idea of "John Law," Spike and Bumps had ceased to fight. Dale Champeau was shooting her open car away at a speed that left the mob far behind. But Spike and Bumps, handcuffed together, could only take to their heels.

The seizing of Peter Doom gave them an opportunity.

"Boy, howdy!" exclaimed Bumps. "It looks like The Skipper and Peter are done for this time!"

The scarred Spike halted, started pulling back.

"Me? By the great hornspoon! I'm goin' back and tear out their livers!"

"You crazy mug!" yelled Bumps. "We can't lick a whole town! We've got to make a get-away, or we won't be of much help to The Skipper. What did Hurricane Dan tell you when they let him go?"

"That's right," muttered Spike, spitting out a loose tooth. "Dan did tell me something! By Davy Jones! I've got it! The canal above the town!"

The oddly matched pair kept to the alleys. Handcuffed together, they arrived at an abandoned oil dock where a canal had been cut in from the river. There was no life here this morning. No life anywhere around the ghostly oil derricks or on the river itself. The population of Riverton had gathered in the heart of the town.

Spike and Bumps searched the surface of the oily, yellow canal.

"Hurricane Dan didn't make it," groaned Spike. "We can't swim all the way back to the *Whirlwind* with these damned irons on us."

Bumps suddenly jerked at his arm. "What would you say that is out there, a snake's head sticking up, or maybe a Mississippi River sea serpent?"

THE thing did look remarkably like the head of a snake. The ghastly sunlight caught and reflected a gleaming eye. This was attached to a dark, tube-like neck. The thing came up, vanished, came up again. Whatever it was, it seemed to be looking around.

Spike shouted, "Hurricane Dan! He made it!"

The snaky eye was moving slowly toward the levee. Just then Bumps heard the clumping of feet coming along the old wharf. Without a word, he jerked the lighter Spike from his feet and sprang into the canal. The oily water bubbled where they went under.

They stayed under the surface and swam as best they could with their free arms. It was lucky the distance was not far. For at the instant they jumped

and dived, the snake eye also went under.

Men on the oil wharf, two policemen, were talking.

One man said: "Unless they drowned themselves, they are around here. One was red-headed and the other looked like the tailings of hell. They were handcuffed together."

Underwater, a thin, piercing blue light shot out. It picked up the floundering figures of Spike and Bumps. A small, silvery submarine nosed along the muddy bottom of the canal, and an escape-chamber door opened.

Spike and Bumps were pulled in, and a minute later Hurricane Dan was rumbling oaths from his deep chest.

"A fine pair of sea lice!" he grumbled. "Leavin' The Skipper an' Peter Doom! I've got three men here, and I'll blow up the damned town!"

But Spike Briggs had had a taste of trying to lick Riverton. He was the chief mate, and he snapped into command.

"They will be taking The Skipper and Peter to that convict ship up the river! That is, if they haven't killed them!"

Shortly thereafter, Captain Fury's small submarine glided along the river bottom. Spike Briggs made an announcement.

"It's The Skipper's order that if any of us get free, our first job is to take this old Champeau lubber off his island below the town. We don't know how soon The Skipper and Peter will be taken to that convict ship. But we'll have to wait for night to land on the Champeau island."

THE SKIPPER was little better informed than Spike as to when he was removed to the convict ship. His head felt as if it were bursting, as his eyes opened. He had the sense of it now being night. There were the cries of night birds, the buzzing of cicadas, the booming of bullfrogs in a swamp not far away.

The rancid odor of men's sweaty bodies, of other filth, assailed The Skipper's nostrils. He turned his head slowly. A slow, solemn voice spoke.

"By all the purple hells, Skipper! I thought you'd never come out of it!"

The Skipper sat up slowly. There was but one dim light at the end of what had been the freight hold of the old steamboat. When the paddle-wheeler had been converted into a convict ship, the space below the deck had been employed for the sleeping quarters of the "cons," white and black.

The Skipper moved his feet. Chains clanked. A scrawny white man beside him said, "Hell, buddy, I thought you was dead! Don't pull that chain! The skin's off my ankle!"

Then Cap saw that he and Peter were chained together by the ankles. A man was chained to them on each side, making four fastened in the row. The ends of the chains were linked into staples driven into the wooden floor.

"How much did old pill-box hand you fellows?" said the man next to The Skipper.

"Six months, maybe more," said Cap.

The convict seemed an intelligent fellow. He said he was from the North, and had been sent up for thirty days for fighting.

"Six months, huh?" he added. "You won't be doin' any six months or six days! You got one helluva break, buddy! We're getting a chance to lam, maybe with plenty in our pockets! Some big bug is behind it! An old Frenchman on an island below the town has got a pile of dough! The boys in Riverton is stirrin' up a mob, then they're cuttin' this hellbox boat loose an' lettin' it drift down on the island!"

"When will that happen?" asked The Skipper.

"To-night, maybe," assured his fellow prisoner. "We're to grab all the

stuff from this old guy's dump and take it on the lam. Then after it's all over, whatever the town mob does will be blamed onto a bunch of us cons breakin' loose."

"Is there no end to this damned, twisted mess?" groaned Peter Doom. "But Skipper, I'm bettin' we won't be on this boat when it's cut loose."

CAP FURY said nothing. He was listening to the murmur of other voices. Most of the convicts, chained in rows where they lay on filthy straw, were awake, talking. There were white men and Negroes. There were many there for minor offenses. But among them were felons, killers, men ready to do murder for a dollar or a dime.

The Skipper could see two guards up by the hatchway of the freight hold through which all convicts must come and go. A deep-voiced bloodhound let out a mournful bay. The intelligent convict swore.

"Them damned dogs!" he grated out. "I don't know how many of the guards are in on this deal! There's been some funny stuff with some kind of a fake voodoo show and liquor for the boys! But a few never come back from that show, and a big half-breed called Sugar Cane was let go by crooked guards!"

"What's your name?" inquired Cap Fury.

"I ain't sayin'," chuckled the con. "But call me Billy. I had a girl always called me that. Me, I'm hitch-hikin' back North when they bust us loose."

The Skipper was reflecting. He could picture to-night in Riverton. Perhaps there had been more green-plague victims. He felt of a tiny object concealed under his shirt. He had taken it from the last victim he had seen back in Judge Thatcher's courtroom. He had heard that the old Negro crone, Mata, had escaped, thanks to Cat Randolph and Dale Champeau.

Cap's brain took on an extra wrinkle. Damned if he could figure this Cat Randolph one way or the other. He had an extra thought. Randolph was undoubtedly in possession of diamonds. Could these have something to do with Mata?

Was Cat Randolph mixed up with the Creole dancer, Rama?

Had Cat Randolph joined hands with Dale Champeau to rescue the old crone?

Had Cat Randolph been associated with Hooker Suggs? Then Hooker Suggs had apparently attempted to prevent Cat Randolph from freeing Mata?

It all added up to one sweet headache and not much more.

But of one item, Captain Fury was certain. The green plague might be contagious, no doubt was, but there was another medium of inoculating special victims with the green-death virus.

Peter Doom said, "We have been in some tight spots together, Skipper. I've always had a hankering to work on a levee. You know, like the song says, but it looks as if our number's up this time. We'll never be permitted to escape with these other cons."

The Skipper emitted a grim chuckle.

"No, we'll not be permitted to escape with the others, but——"

WHATEVER The Skipper had in mind, his picture of Riverton could at this time have included what amounted to an organized mob. That convict guard of the thick lips, Hooker Suggs, and Yall Jutt were the leading spirits after darkness shrouded the city in the swamps.

Word was being passed along. The citizens were at a boiling pitch. The policemen of Chief Ulan were queerly inactive. Not a copper appeared in the streets of the older houses when segments of the city mob started burning and pillaging. Houses of the older citizens, the French-type residences with shutters, became the targets.

Three houses in one whole block were

burning. The aristocratic inhabitants had been forced to flee. But among these there were no killings. The mob seemed only warming up its blood for what was to come later.

"Destroy the Champeau island! Get Mata! Drive the Champeaus out!"

So, at nearly midnight, the mob took on a semblance of order. Yall Jutt was everywhere. Hooker Suggs was with him part of the time. For the first time, the opposition to lawlessness of Mayor Samuel Pound was unheeded.

The avowed candidate for governor tried to make a speech, but he was booed down. And at midnight, the mob march started. Pine torches flamed. Some one had resurrected a drum. He was doing a *tum-tum-tum* like the lonesome beating of the voodoo ceremony.

And at about this time, Captain Fury's sleek submarine glided down the big river, its knifelike conning tower barely submerged. The conning wedge as sharp as an axe that could tear its way through steel or wood.

The scarred and ugly Spike Briggs was at the sub's controls, and in command. The giant Hurricane Dan stood on braced feet beside him. Bumps McCarthy was the third man on board. Because of their mission, which was to take Andre Champeau off his island below the city, Spike had included no extra men.

The Skipper's submarine operated on tubular power. It was a miracle of battle and defensive devices. Though small, its submerging time was made greater than that of a large naval sub, because of the specially devised oxygen tanks.

"That line o' lights would be the old lubber's bridge," said Spike, as a row of lamps like jewels strung over black water leaped into the mirror of the periscope. "It's up to us to lay to all sweet an' quiet, an' if Champeau starts lettin' out a squawk, we'll grab him anyway. The Skipper said he might object to being snatched from his island."

The silvery sub was a swift craft. The lights in the periscope gave way to a small, arched causeway which ran from the mainland below the city over a short space of river to the long island. The Champeau mansion showed now, a brilliant blaze of lights. For miles beyond the higher ground of the Champeau estate, the gray ghost trees of the swamps marched through the bayous and the black holes and the muck of Great Cypress.

Spike, at the controls, suddenly let out a sailor's oath.

"Lookit! Damn my eyes! Whadda you think that is, Bumps? Some kind of a parade?"

CHAPTER VIII.

SHIP OF THE FIENDS.

THE line of smoking pine torches was moving along the river front. It approached the narrow causeway to the Champeau island like some writhing, serpentine monster. The vibration device in the submarine picked up the monotonous, sinister rumbling of a single drum. A combined growl coming from the Riverton mob resembled that of some great beast.

"It's a parade, all right!" said Bumps McCarthy to Spike. "And it's a funeral march for old Andre Champeau and his daughter! Have a look over there!"

"Over there" was the levee wall that protected the upper shores of the Champeau island from Mississippi floods. Lights from the causeway revealed two-score or more dark figures kneeling along the wall. Their faces and their hands were uplifted.

It seemed that the colored retainers of the Champeau family could see only doom coming upon them. They had known of the seizure and the escape of Mata, the old Negro crone. She was now concealed on the island.

The Champeaus, the colored servants

were pinched between the oncoming mob from the city and the desolation of the wilderness swamp of the Great Cypress which crossed from the mainland and extended for miles along the southern portion of the island.

"We're too late, Spike!" groaned Bumps. "The submarine cannot be landed, and we have no time to get out an emergency boat! We should have come openly in one of the speed launches!"

Spike's small eyes glittered among his scars. For that tough chief mate of the old *Whirlwind,* it was never too late. Not as long as a fight seemed to be brewing. His mouth tightened.

"Too late, my eye!" he snapped. "Hurricane Dan, man both forward tubes!"

"But Spike!" gasped Bumps. "You can't do that! It would be wholesale murder! It would be——"

"The proper sort of medicine for alla them swabs!" cut in Spike. "They've got The Skipper, ain't they? They've got Peter, ain't they?"

The swift submarine now was gliding slowly, the turtleback deck of mirror-like metal flush with the yellow water and taking on its color. The periscope and The Skipper's own microphonic listening devices were portraying all of the drama.

"Boy, howdy!" ejaculated Bumps. "There's a car tearing through the mob! Look! It's on the causeway, an' stoppin'!"

THE car was an expensive open job. It skidded onto the narrow causeway. The driver braked and turned it broadside to the oncoming hundreds of maddened mobsters. Cursing shouts arose.

Spike and Bumps saw the ponderous figure of Mayor Samuel Pound rear up on a seat. His arms were waving, with his broad hat in one hand.

"Fellow citizens," he shouted oratorically, "this must not be! I say to stop! Stop and think! I shall order the police——"

"Pull him down! Get Mata! Club the police!"

The mob roar drowned out Samuel Pound's unctuous voice. Spike and Bumps saw a number of the straw-hatted policemen carrying shotguns.

"Police, hell!" grated Bumps. "That Chief Ulan and his men are out for murder as much as the rest of them! There's Yall Jutt, and that Hooker Suggs!"

Mr. Jutt and Hooker Suggs were at the head of the mob. They were among those to reach Samuel Pound's car. Amid oaths, many hands pulled the ponderous mayor from the seat. Cries of rage accompanied a surge of many shoulders and the expensive automobile upended, crashed upon and went over the low rail of the causeway.

"Out of the way! Get Mata! Burn the Champeaus!"

A hideous nightmare of human frenzy, it was. Torches waved, the drum beat and the mob fell into step again, pounding onto the causeway. Two hundred yards ahead lay the island. There were the Negro servants along the levee wall. Now these retainers started fleeing. Perhaps they judged the dangers of the Great Cypress were preferable to being torn to bits.

No doubt the old Frenchman, Champeau, would be ready to fight to the last for his property, for his honor. Dale Champeau would be there with him. Mata was concealed somewhere. The art treasures of the Champeaus, the mansion itself would be pillaged.

"There's that Cat Randolph!" suddenly exclaimed Bumps, swinging the periscope. "He's starting right toward that mob alone! Look!"

"I'm lookin'!" rapped out Spike Briggs. "An' damn my eyes if I don't believe that swab is a dirty double-crosser! He ain't armed, and——"

Hurricane Dan grumbled from his thick chest.

"Tubes all set, Spike!"

The scarred chief mate glued an eye to the periscope, to the sighting glasses. The mob was a third of the way across the causeway. Cat Randolph was walking alone to meet it. Between them was a clear hundred yards of the causeway.

"Let 'em slide, Hurricane Dan!" rapped out Spike.

TWO sleek torpedoes left the forward tubes with only a slight hissing. Perhaps none of that mob saw the twin wake laid down across the surface of the yellow water. Spike let out an oath and a groan.

"Missed, by damn!"

One torpedo had shot through a curving arch supporting the causeway. But Spike's oath was lost in a rumbling, earth-jolting crash of thunder. The second torpedo had struck. Its impact seemed to lift the river from its bed.

Perhaps it was the tons of water suddenly rolling up that saved some of the leaders of the mob from annihilation. They were caught by the huge wave and swept back upon their companions, the pine torches sizzling out.

Huge segments of the concrete causeway separated. It was fortunate for the blood-mad citizens of Riverton that the cement was solid and was not rained upon them in small bits. The torpedo had ripped out one whole pier. The lone figure of Cat Randolph at the island end was lost to view. It seemed impossible that he could have survived.

"Great glory!" gulped Bumps, sweat popping out. "You've done it now, Spike! Why, it's murder——"

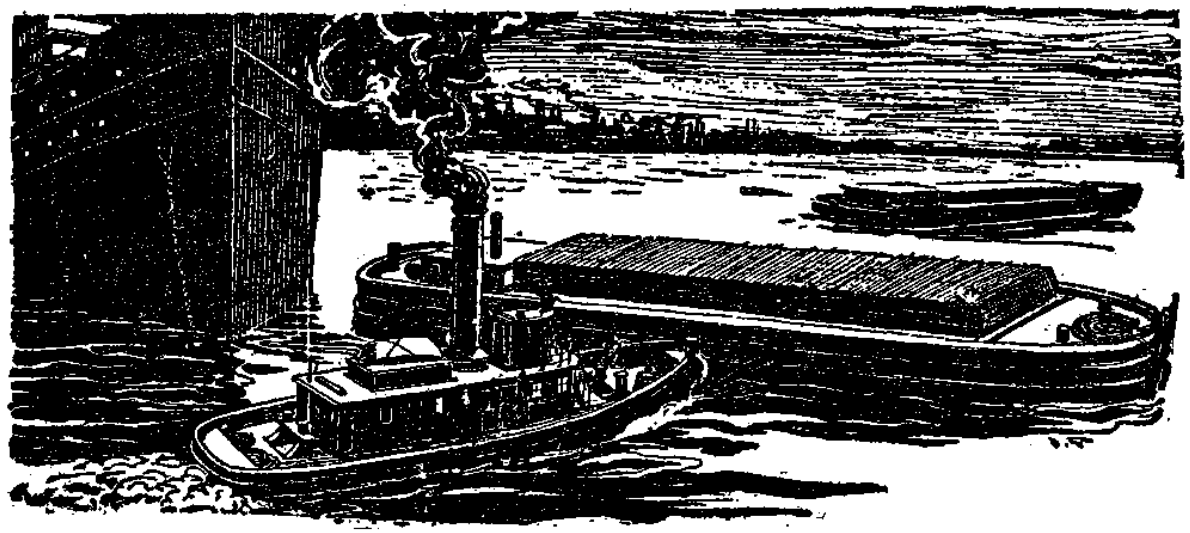
"Nary a damned man!" grinned the ugly Spike Briggs. "Look! Maybe it got that Cat Randolph, but I aimed to miss all the others! By the great hornspoon, my hearties, I'll bet your stomachs are crawlin'! Now where's your stomach for torturin' and burnin' women an' old men?"

Spike was correct. The shocked, surprised mob was turning back upon itself, fleeing in panic. It seemed that none had been killed. But a wide gap had split the causeway, leaving no footage for any person to cross.

Anyway, the members of that swampers' mob were in no mood for crossing. Mayor Samuel Pound was mopping his forehead, running heavily after the others, looking around. He had one glimpse of a gleaming turtleback deck on the river above the causeway. Then the silvery monster slowly submerged.

"Now would be the time to rescue Champeau!" suggested Bumps.

"He'll keep safe enough!" gritted Spike. "We're headin' back to the



Whirlwind! I'm haulin' The Skipper and Peter out've that convict ship, if I have to pick them out of the splinters!"

Spike, with his desperate intention, shot the sub to the surface. He set a course straight up the river toward the old tanker. The plotters of Riverton had been given their first real taste of what might be expected at the hands of The Skipper and the men they had been kicking around.

BUT there was one man of the Riverton mob leaders who beat the others to a short-wave radio set back in the city. Chained in the convict hold of the old river steamboat, The Skipper and Peter Doom heard the commotion of new activity. Billy, the young convict chained beside Cap, said, "We are on our way! It's come! Hear that!"

The Skipper heard the grating of a chain on the deck. The steamboat turned sluggishly on the river current. Its anchor was being lifted. A line was being hauled in from the shore end.

"Damme, if I could only get at the staples holding this chain!" said Peter. "Skipper, we're caught like rats this time! Maybe they're floating the ship down on the Champeau island, and the guards have overlooked us!"

"You're mistaken, Peter," said Cap cheerfully. "Here they come!"

Two glowering guards with sawed-off shotguns had dropped into the hold.

"Git them dudes out!" ordered one. "Bring all four of 'em up!"

One guard was unlocking the chains at the ends. The rusty iron links still held the ankles of the four men together. Billy was jerked to his feet. As The Skipper and Peter got up, the fourth man, a gaunt skeleton of a swamper convict, moved slowly, groaning. One guard swore and slapped the man with his hard open hand. The swamper spewed blood and hastened his movement.

The two guards held the ends of the chains with the four prisoners between them. Long iron spikes at their ankles hampered their walking. But they were half dragged to the deck of the striped ship. Other guards were leaving the steamboat in small boats. It seemed that the plot was to permit the convicts to land alone on the Champeau island.

"Now, my dudes!" snarled one guard. "Jake's goin' below to unlock all the other cons! They're goin' to have a swell dish! But you fellows are due to escape! Escape, understand! That's orders!"

The bulky guard laughed evilly. His shotgun covered the four men. The Skipper made no reply. He was watching the strip of river widening between the boat and the levees. From down in the hold came the sounds of convict chains being unfastened. A bedlam of voices arose.

The Skipper and Peter knew well enough what the guard meant by their escape. It was old stuff. Perhaps they would be shoved into the river, then blasted with buckshot. Or blasted by buckshot, and then shoved into the river.

The guard's narrowed eyes and twitching hands were evidence he would enjoy his sweet job. Young Billy groaned.

"Hell, fellow!" he said to the guard. "You ain't meanin' all of us are——"

"Can it!" snapped the guard. "The boss hain't got any love for you smart Yankees!"

The other guard was coming back to the deck.

"All set down below, Steve! Let's get it over!"

Two shotguns covered the four chained men. The guards had great confidence in the deadly sawed-off weapons. It was apparent they intended driving the four off the flat deck, shooting them as they went. The Skipper nudged Pe-

ter's side with an elbow. He said, "Now!"

THEIR ankles were chained, but their hands were free. Cap Fury dropped to his knees, pulling Billy with him. Peter lurched forward, one long arm swiping the swamper convict out of his way.

Oaths sprang to the lips of the guards. One shotgun belched. But the other did not. Possibly the second guard would never know why he was unable to shoot. The Skipper's sudden dive to the deck, the hurtling forward of the stocky figure was like the movement of some jungle cat.

Young Billy was jerked along by the chains on his ankles. Cap's lightning fists shot out. One and two! This was no time for ethics. The Skipper struck with driving knuckles where the blows would do the most harm; he was still on his knees and the rights and lefts sank into soft flesh.

The big guard toppled on top of Cap. Peter's bony hands snapped on the ankles of the other guard. The belching shotgun hit the back of Peter's neck, but did not shake his bulldog grip. The chained four and the two guards became a tangled, squirming mass.

Peter displayed no more ethics than had The Skipper. The back of his hard skull jerked upward under the guard's chin. Teeth and bones crunched.

"Over the side!" bellowed The Skipper. "The other guards will be coming back on us now!"

This was true. The guards in small boats and some in a launch were turning back to the steamboat as they heard the thunder of the shotgun.

Peter grunted, "What a mess! Over we go!"

Peter was referring to the swamper chained to his ankles. The shotgun blast had almost decapitated the prisoner. It was The Skipper's mighty, straining muscles that pulled all of the scrambled men over the unrailed side of the flat deck.

As they went under the yellow water, Cap's hands slipped up to the throat of the guard who had so coolly informed him they were to be shot down escaping. Bubbles arose on the surface. That guard would never shoot another convict. Cap released his hold and struck out, swimming.

The guard Peter had knocked out with his head did not come up, either. Bubbles were still stringing from where he went down as Cap and Peter drove their heads above the surface. Guns blasted and buckshot skipjacked all around them. Cap saw that Billy could swim.

Billy said, "We ain't got a chance, but that was swell!"

Peter was having trouble. The dead swamper was dragging at his ankles. His feet did not help him much, and only the strokes of his long arms kept him afloat. More shot pattered, and a rifle bullet said *"Whee-ee-ee!"*

"They've got us!" rapped out Cap. "Down deep, and hold on until your lungs burst!"

THAT was easier for The Skipper than the others. He could remain under water nearly three minutes. Peter's breath was shorter. Cap felt Billy begin to strangle and flounder. But, with the weight of the dead man to help, The Skipper held the three of them to the muddy bottom, striking straight out into the river.

When they emerged slowly, with Billy unconscious and Peter still hampered by the dead man, the guards in the boats were following the striped convict ship. Four men chained together. Hell! If the shot had not got them, they could not swim far. And perhaps the guards decided they would like to be in on the merry party of death and plunder about to be visited upon the Champeau island.

"Over the side!" bellowed The Skipper.

For the guards had been informed by the boss in Riverton that the city mob had been cut off and the citizens were afraid to use boats to reach the island, because of a submarine in the river that had broken the causeway. So the guards must have pictured themselves joining the convicts in the first sacking of the Champeau mansion. Then, too, they had heard of the Mata diamonds.

Thus it happened that Spike Briggs had just given the order to weigh anchor, when Hurricane Dan and Bumps reported the convict ship floating past, heading for the Champeau island. The raucous shouts and singing of the suddenly freed convicts proclaimed their passing. The guards had obeyed orders, and gallons of swamp gin had been placed where the prisoners could get at it.

Spike hurriedly changed his command. The anchor settled back into the river mud.

"We'll stand a better chance with the sub!" stated Spike. "We can trail that damned ship, and I'll make it aboard!"

Spike had no means of knowing that at this minute, The Skipper and Peter, their ankles chained to a dead man, were being forced to yield to the river current and drift toward the Champeau island.

Even The Skipper's tremendous strength had been insufficient to buck the river toward the *Whirlwind*. But, with Billy, they were able to keep afloat as the lights of the island came closer.

CHAPTER IX.

DIAMONDS IN A TREE.

THE river current swung Cap, Peter and Billy onto a sandy spit outside the levee of the Champeau island. The convict ship had kept pace with them. The Skipper swore as he heard the striking of the steamboat on the levee wall not far away.

Peter stared at the bloody corpse fastened to the chains.

"I've been in some funny spots!" rumbled Peter. "But damme, if I ever expected to be hooked up to a dead man!"

The Skipper did not reply. His powerful hands were feeling along the rusty links of the chain. He found a weak spot close to the dead man's ankles. His shoulders strained and iron snapped.

At about this time, the gray-haired, dignified Andre Champeau was in the door of his lighted mansion. He held a repeating rifle across his arm. Dale stood close to his side.

"For some reason, they won't use boats," said Champeau heavily. "If I only knew how the causeway was blown up. I have been told that Captain John Fury has many strange resources, and that may be it! If so, then we are safe for the time!"

"Oh, why doesn't he come?" exclaimed the lovely girl.

Andre Champeau did not reply to this. He had seen his twoscore Negro servants fleeing toward the swamp. The man's troubled eyes turned toward the gray-armed ghosts of the cypress that marched away among bayous and black pools of death.

"The poor devils!" he exclaimed. "Dale, you must stay here! I will try to find the Negroes and bring them back! I'm sure Captain Fury will be along!"

The old man glanced over his shoulder into the mansion that had been in the family for four generations. Costly pictures were on its walls. Its ancient furniture would have brought a fortune in any antique shop. Andre had stood ready to defend his property to the death.

Champeau no doubt had felt great relief when the mob had been stopped.

"At least, we have survived for the time," he said. "Dale, we will make our way to the launch and try to find Captain Fury's ship on the river——"

"What was that?" interjected the girl, her luminous eyes widening as she caught her father's arm. "Listen!"

Champeau did not need to be told to listen. There came sudden cries of fear from the direction of the black swamp, perhaps a quarter of a mile from the mansion. The sound of blows, of oaths, were interspersed with the screams of Negro men and women. Clubs and gun barrels were crashing on kinky heads.

A few of the fleeing servants had been keeping to the dry shore of a bayou. Before they had seen it, a poled flatboat had slid to the bank near by. Cursing, yelling convicts with fragments of chains clanking, with the giant, long-armed Sugar Cane as their leader, rushed upon them.

For only a minute or so, there was ruthless beating down of the Negro servants, men and women.

Hearing this, Andre Champeau said, "Stay here, Dale! I will go!"

But the girl sprang to one side and seized a shotgun. She joined her father as he was crossing the porch with its colonial pillars. They reached the lawn, then they were halted.

FROM the upper end of the island, only a short distance away, came the blood-curdling cries of other men. These were like curses of maniacs. The ginned convicts were scarcely less than that.

They were pouring from the grounded convict boat across the levee.

"Make for the hollow tree, Dale!" gritted Andre Champeau. "The mob has come in boats! I'll join you at once!"

Champeau believed the city mob at last decided to use boats. The girl slipped away, going in the direction of the swamp. Her father was back through the door of the ancestral mansion. He was inside but a few seconds. He emerged running.

There came a mushy explosion. Flame and smoke billowed from the door of the Champeau residence. The blaze leaped up, caught at the pillars of the porch and shot across the roof.

Andre Champeau's wrinkled face was a grim mask.

"Their hands will never desecrate our home," he said with the quiet of a man who sees all his possessions gone. "We will get to Mata and the hollow tree. Come, Dale."

Convicts from the grounded boat were streaming under the trees, coming toward them. Insane yells broke out as billows of flame formed a great torch and outlined the ghostly arms of cypress, yells and curses at being balked of the loot they had been promised.

Champeau was running, with Dale at his side. They started around the head of a small bayou. The giant figure of Sugar Cane plunged upon them so swiftly that Champeau's rifle was knocked from his hand. The mulatto convict's long arms flailed out and a fist battered the old man's face.

Dale screamed once, bringing up the shotgun. The weapon exploded, but its charge hurtled into the trees. Two convicts with leering grins and slavering mouths had sprung upon the girl, beating her to the ground.

"Them damned other'nes is comin'!" shouted Sugar Cane.

"Kill the old blue blood!" shouted a swamper convict. "Kill 'im, an' take the gal to the swamps!"

The convict clubbed his shotgun to carry out an evident intention to smash the skull of the helpless Andre Champeau. Sugar Cane lashed out with a great fist, felling the man.

"Y' ig'orant swamp angel!" he shouted. "Them's got di'mon's! They's hid some'eres about, an' we'll make him talk!"

Sugar Cane lifted Champeau into his giant arms and dumped his frail body into the flatboat. The now silent, white-faced girl was pushed into the craft, a brutal hand holding back her attempt to draw a breath. The boat was poled silently along the bayou, making toward the depths of the Great Cypress. Sugar Cane looked at the figure of Dale Champeau and licked his thick lips with relish.

"Him be'n't maybe not talk," said the mulatto. "Her tell us sho' 'nough. Take 'em to the black hole of the big ol' one!"

It was evident that Sugar Cane was informed by some source of the Champeau fortune, and that he did not attribute the green diamonds to any sorcery of old Mata. His warped brain had contrived a way in which he believed he might compel Dale Champeau to reveal the hiding place of the jewels.

SHORTLY before Andre Champeau had fired his own ancestral mansion, the mysterious Cat Randolph proved he had survived the blast of the submarine at the causeway. For he was in his boat with the silent motor. He had gone swiftly to the boat when he had seen the city mob balked.

"Cat!" said a silky voice from the darkness in the boat. "Will we get them now? I will be through with Hooker Suggs! We will take them and go away, Cat! You can't go back to the town!"

Cat Randolph's gray eyes were upon the glowing black orbs of the girl. The

caressing tone of his voice indicated he might be deeply infatuated with her.

He said, "We will take the diamonds now, Rama. We will go away. I believe I know a ship on the river where we will be safe until it sails."

Randolph's silent boat entered a crooked bayou. It was like a shadow moving in the night mist of the swamp. Presently, the swamper master of wild cats grounded the boat softly on a yielding bank of muck.

"Come, Rama," he said. "You will see the fortune, and may you like it."

The girl's hand reached up and touched his face, but Randolph pushed it away.

"Wait until you see, Rama," he said.

None would have suspected that the great cypress tree beside which Randolph paused was any different from thousands of others in the black swamp. The bending knees of the big tree gave the aspect of some hideous, human giant standing in the muck. The girl Rama clung close to Cat Randolph.

"What could be here, Cat?" she said. "If you are fooling me——"

Randolph's hand gripped one of the bent roots. The wood yielded as if it were swung on oiled hinges. As it lifted, an opening sufficient for a man to enter was disclosed. A flashlight shot a ray down a queerly built stairway. The stair was constructed of other roots.

But as they reached the bottom of this, Rama gasped. For she was looking at tight walls of concrete in a spacious underground room. These walls were filled with oil paintings and rare tapestries. At one end were piled chests and trunks of ancient pattern.

Cat Randolph walked over to the chests. The walls were repeated in the floor and ceiling of the strange treasure cave. Because of the swamp water, the vault had been made proof against moisture, its only entrance through the roots of the cypress.

Cat Randolph opened a small chest. When his hand came out, a stream of green fire played under the flashlight. It was a necklace of diamonds.

"Oh, Cat!" exclaimed Rama. "I've never seen any like it!"

"There are none like the Champeau diamonds," stated Cat Randolph. "They will set off your dark skin."

THE flashing jewels did form a beautiful contrast to the smooth, dark throat of the girl as Randolph slipped them over her head.

Then the cat swamper started pulling leather pouches from the chest. These tinkled musically. Perhaps Cat did not see the avaricious gleam come into the girl's black eyes. Nor did he seem to notice the slender, sinuous hand she slipped into the bosom of her dress. The top of an ivory-handled stiletto glistened for an instant, then the girl's hand dropped.

There was murder in Rama's eyes, but as Cat Randolph turned, she became again the clinging creature she had been. Randolph was a man of the quickest vision. None other could have taken wild cats alive in the swamp. But he appeared to have missed Rama's menacing movement.

The man's clothing was heavy with the sacks of jewels when they emerged from under the hollow tree. Rama had wondered what might be in the other chests. Perhaps she was not so finished with Hooker Suggs as she had stated to Randolph. The girl might have wondered more if she had known of the faint movement immediately after they had left the hollow cypress.

The great root that concealed the doorway had closed. A slight, bent figure moved from behind one of the chests. There was a mumbling voice that did not seem to make coherent words.

The figure was none other than the

toothless Negro crone, Mata. As the door was closed above, the ancient Negress, who was accused of witchcraft, stretched herself wearily on the floor of concrete. She could understand only Dale and her master. Possibly she was hoping they would soon come to take her back to her comfortable cabin.

Cat Randolph's boat slid away along the bayou.

"We will make it out to the ship, as I told you," he said to Rama.

WHEN Champeau's mansion blazed against the murky sky, The Skipper had snapped the chain binding Peter, Billy and him to the dead man. Cap said, "We will see what can be done. It seems we have come too late. But perhaps Champeau and his daughter have hidden somewhere in the swamp. That fire started before the convicts could have reached the house."

"By all the green hells!" rumbled Peter. "Listen to the lunatics yell! You're right, old Champeau must have heard them coming and beat them to it with a torch!"

They could hear raging convicts shouting. Then they saw them through the trees, dancing madly around the burning mansion. At that moment, a launch turned from the river, coming directly toward Cap and Peter.

CHAPTER X.

OVER THE BLACK POOL.

"THE damned dogs!" exclaimed Billy, the young convict. "There's some of the guards in that launch! If they get us——"

The deep-throated baying of bloodhounds floated across the river. A dozen men were standing in the approaching launch. The Skipper led Peter and Billy among the trees, making toward the depths of the swamp.

"We will wait until they have passed," said Cap. "I hope that Champeau was wise enough to get away. But we have little chance to find him."

Their chance to get anywhere in the swamp was slim. Cap had been unable to break other links of the chains holding their ankles. Iron bands bit into their flesh. There was about two feet of chain between two men.

But waiting until the guards passed was suddenly impossible. Armed men and the dogs streamed onto the levee. A guard set up a shout. They had unluckily landed at the exact spot where the murdered convict still lay with the broken chain on his ankles.

"Three of 'em got away!" yelled a guard. "Here's their footprints in the mud, and they're still dragging the chains! Give the dogs the smell of them!"

Cap Fury already was moving, compelling the others to go with him. For the deep voices of the bloodhounds broke suddenly into a frenzy. Those big, droop-jawed fellows with their slashing fangs knew what this meant. They were on the trail. At the end would be the usual feast.

Cursing guards were being pulled along by the dogs on their leashes. Then one man shouted, "Let the dogs free! They'll tree 'em!"

"Damme," groaned Peter. "That's the finish! The way we're hooked up, we couldn't run away from a poodle!"

But Cap had plunged to his waist in water and muck.

"They can't follow us far if we stay off the hummocks," he explained.

But Billy and Peter suddenly went in over their heads. The muck had ended in a hole, and beyond this was a series of humped, dry hummocks. Cap dragged the others to land and they started running as best they could. But it was of little good.

The trained bloodhounds gained rapidly. This was old stuff to the dogs. Many times they had trailed down escaped convicts. Sometimes the guards

got to the dogs while the fugitives were still alive; that is, if the convicts were lucky enough to find a tree where they could climb away from the half-wild beasts.

Peter groaned heavily. Blood was running from his ankles where the iron spike tortured his flesh. The spike was designed to do exactly that. Billy's ankles were like raw meat. They stumbled across the series of hummocks. Peter fell, but came to his feet with an oath of dismay.

A brown, slimy thing with an open white mouth had hissed close to his body. It was one of the countless water moccasins of the swamps, not so deadly as a rattler, but poison enough to stop any man.

THEY arrived at a stretch of smooth black water. A great cypress with giant knees was on the other side. It afforded a temporary shelter.

"We will have to swim for it," said Cap. "The dogs are far enough ahead of the guards to be stopped."

He was feeling inside his shirt for the flat flare pistol he used as a signal. It was the only weapon their captors had not discovered. The charges in the pistol were waterproof. Cap had the thought that the burning powder might stop the dogs.

The three plunged awkwardly into the pool, swimming. Billy cried out:

"Look out! 'Gator!"

Something like a huge log suddenly became animated. A red-and-white mouth opened and gaped. But the alligator glided sluggishly aside.

"He will not attack us," said Cap. "Now if it were a crocodile——"

The alligator went into the depths of the hole. The three men gained the slippery roots, pulled themselves upon them. They could see faintly here by the spreading blaze of the mansion shining through the trees.

"Here they come!" grunted Peter. "But I hear the guards!"

The guards were some distance behind the two big dogs that sprang across the hummock opposite the pool. The baying voices arose to a frenzied pitch. They had sighted their quarry. The panting mouths showed deadly fangs. The bloodhounds needed no scent to follow now.

With roaring, baying snarls, both dogs leaped into the black pool, swimming. Cap's signal pistol came into his hand. He was aware the flare of the signal charge would reveal them to the oncoming guards, but the dogs had to be stopped.

The Skipper himself could have swung into the trees. But he was chained to the others, and climbing the giant cypress was impossible. Cap's hand tightened on the pistol trigger, but he did not pull it.

An agonized yelp came from one of the swimming bloodhounds. It was drowned as the fanged head was suddenly pulled under the surface. The water of the pool swirled. The alligator might not attack a man, but a dog was something else.

The remaining dog seemed confused. He started to swim in a circle. The water boiled again. The bloodhound's baying voice was stopped. There was more than one alligator in the pool.

The Skipper saw their only hope was to get deeper into the swamp. He and the others managed to climb from the cypress roots into a shallow patch of swamp. As they gained this, listening to the shouts of the raging and puzzled pursuers, what looked like a tall, dark specter glided swiftly past in a near-by bayou. A little flashlight glowed, and went out.

"By all the holies!" gritted The Skipper. "Cat Randolph!"

His quick eyes had seen the face of the tall man standing in the boat, the

darker countenance of the girl crouched at his feet. The boat's motor gave forth only a low humming. The boat swiftly vanished, apparently going deeper in the Great Cypress.

The three fleeing men managed to cross nearly a mile of the swamp. They heard the final oaths of the balked guards. When the men had come to the pool where their bloodhounds had vanished, they were at a loss.

"Damn 'em!" said a guard. "Somehow, they've killed the dogs!"

The guards did not attempt to flounder beyond the black pool. They turned back toward the blazing mansion of Andre Champeau. They had hoped to join the convicts in looting the place, perhaps taking the most valuable stuff. Now they could only stand helplessly by and watch the house burn.

The freed convicts were becoming more subdued. Some were slipping away toward the swamp. At least they could make a get-away. The guards did not interfere. Perhaps they were trying to frame some explanation for the mysterious boss.

DEEP in the swamp, Cap Fury said, "We can swing now toward the river. When we are clear, I'll use the signal flare for Spike."

The going was slow. The Skipper's compass gave him the direction, but he could not be sure how many miles of muck lay between them and open water. Then Peter halted, crouching.

"Isn't that a fire of some kind down there?" he exclaimed.

The others saw the smudgy flare against the trees. They were now perhaps two miles from the Champeau mansion. But if there had been no blaze, a woman's sudden, terror-filled scream would have halted them. She screamed again and again, inhumanly.

Cap used bitter oaths as he swore at the chains impeding their plunge toward the flare among the ghostly trees. The woman was screaming as if she could never stop.

Wading in muck to their waists, pulling each other from sucking sand, the three reached the rising edge of a wide hammock. The moss-draped trees grew thickly here, forming almost a wall on the firmer ground. Cautioning the others to move silently, The Skipper drew the signal pistol. It was a poor weapon, but the best he had.

"Maybe it's that Rama from the Swamp Club," whispered Peter. "And if it is, I'd say she's only getting what's coming to her."

But they came to the thinning edge of the mossy wall. They could see a smudgy blaze beside a round, deep black pool. There was an arm of cypress hanging over the murky water.

The beautiful Dale Champeau was screaming. As Cap and Peter saw her, Sugar Cane's huge hand closed over her mouth, cutting off the cries. The girl apparently had battled with the convicts holding her until her dress was nearly stripped away.

There were eight or ten ragged, evil-faced swampers besides Sugar Cane himself. Dale Champeau was staring with horrified eyes at the black pool. Her father was suspended from the limb of the cypress by a cotton rope. Two convicts held this rope.

"Yo' be'n't talk, huh?" snarled Sugar Cane. "Let the big ol' one have him!"

No more hideous torture for the girl could have been contrived. Old Andre Champeau already had been tortured. The cotton rope was under his arms. His trousers had been ripped away below the knees. Perhaps knives had been used. Champeau's thin legs dripped blood. The flesh had been slashed into shreds above his ankles.

THE old man's feet were nearly touching the pool. A great, toothed snout stuck up from the water. While an alligator would not attack a man, a

feed of already bleeding flesh would never be refused.* The 'gator must have been all of eight feet in length.

"Sho' talk!" commanded Sugar Cane, releasing Dale Champeau's lips. "He be'n't have no laigs onless you say it 'bout them di'mon's!"

Old Champeau's body was permitted to slip lower. The big alligator reared his head high, jaws snapping within an inch of the dangling feet.

"Let him go! My poor father! Oh, stop it!" screamed Dale Champeau. "I'll tell you all you want to know! The hollow cypress! I'll lead you——"

Old Andre Champeau's stricken voice rang out:

"No, Dale! Never! Champeaus never quit! They can't do more than kill me! Then they'll take you, anyway! Tell them nothing!"

"Give 'm to the——"

Sugar Cane's bellowed command got no further than that. The signal-flare pistol in The Skipper's hand cracked. It cracked three times. Each time what appeared to be flashing, sizzling rockets shot across the black pool.

The pistol-signal flares were like those of a Very pistol used in the War. If they had been shot skyward, they would have burst in spreading clouds of flames. But Cap had sighted at the trunk of the cypress. The rockets mushroomed with loud, hissing explosions.

The black space over the alligator pool was instantly filled with blinding light, green light that blanked out the eyes of Sugar Cane and the other convicts. Two of their shotguns roared, but they were shooting at random, hitting nothing.

"Hit's de ha'nt!" screamed a swamper. "We-uns done been overtuk!"

Those who could see the green flare, smell the hot tang of the signal powder, may have associated this light with the green death, the voodoo rites which they had witnessed.

The Skipper dragged Peter and Billy with him as he charged from concealment, eyes fixed upon the giant Sugar Cane. But the chains about their ankles were tangled in mossy roots, and Cap plunged to his face.

The convicts were piling into their flatboat. They had released the cotton rope suspending Andre Champeau. The old Frenchman with the bleeding legs splashed into the black pool where the huge alligator was lurking.

Dale Champeau screamed, but the cry was cut off. Sugar Cane had the girl in his arms and he reached the boat as it glided into a bayou.

BOUND together by their chains, Cap and Peter could only rage helplessly. It seemed for the moment that not only was Dale Champeau's fate sealed, but that her father must have died quickly. The convict flatboat went away with the silence of a ghost gliding over black water and was lost to view in the morass of the swamp.

Then Billy, the convict, cried out, "The old fellow's makin' it out!"

The three of them got to the edge of the black pool. The white face of old Andre Champeau appeared. The suddenness of his plunge, or perhaps the effect of the vivid green flare still burning had caused the alligator to retreat hastily.

Champeau's slashed legs were helpless as they got him ashore.

"Captain Fury!" he exclaimed at last,

* Contrary to popular belief, alligators of the American South do not attack humans. Their natural food consists of fish and small animals unwary enough to venture near their pools. The largest alligator will take flight if a man enters the water. Only if a human should molest her eggs might the female alligator possibly defend them. Alligators battle each other for the same reason. Residents of the Florida Everglades laugh at the fear of alligators displayed by Northerners. It is possible a small child might be hurt by an alligator, but only if the alligator believed it was acting in defense, and not because it has an appetite for human flesh. On the other hand, crocodiles of the tropics, both American and of the other side of the world, are vicious consumers of human flesh, and many natives are killed by them annually. On Florida alligator farms, a feature is the wrestling with huge alligators by men.

The old man's feet were nearly touching the pool

his eyes sunken with grief. "It is too late! I wish I had died! My daughter!"

"Perhaps there is some hope," replied Cap instantly. "Those convicts seem determined to find your diamonds. The girl probably is safe as long as the stones are not found."

There was a faint gleam of hope in Andre Champeau's face.

"The convicts cannot find the diamonds," he stated.

The Skipper directed a slow movement toward the river. Champeau knew the swamp, and he guided them. They were favored by Cap's own green flare. For that glaring light had mushroomed high above the swamp trees. And its appearance had brought action.

"Cock-eye" Sammons, third mate of the *Whirlwind*, saw it. A stream-lined speedboat shot away from the ship. Less than half an hour later, Cap and the others were being taken from a river levee far below the burned Champeau mansion.

The green signal flare had been seen by others. For at this moment, Spike Briggs was commanding the *Whirlwind* submarine, cruising the surface off the island. Spike speeded the sub toward the nearest bayou opening into Great Cypress Swamp.

The black bayou angled suddenly away from the green signal light.

CHAPTER XI.

IN HANDS OF THE CAT.

ABOUT the time Captain Fury, Peter, Champeau and Billy, the convict, were picked up by the *Whirlwind's* stream-lined boat, the silvery submarine was acting much like a fish out of water. Spike Briggs was swearing at the controls, at the swamp, at all creation, and especially at the black muck that had prevented the sub from pushing farther into the swamp.

He was accompanied by Bumps McCarthy and Hurricane Dan Belmont. The three had started out in the sub when the convict ship had been cut loose. Though they were close, the pouring ashore of the convicts, the burning of the Champeau mansion had caused Spike to hold off.

"The Skipper ain't in that mix-up," Spike had said. "If he was, there would be all hell poppin'!"

They had missed the landing of Cap and the pursuit by the guards. Now, in the depths of the swamp with the submarine, even the guiding green flare had burned out. The sub was on the surface. Spike snapped open the connecting hatch. He climbed out with Bumps beside him.

The ghostly silence of the draped trees and the gray mist was broken by only the hoarse wumping of frogs. Bumps shivered and hunched his broad shoulders.

"We're not doing any good here, Spike," the cameraman said. "I feel something, and I don't like it. As if there were dead men all around us."

But if Bumps felt the presence of others, they were not dead. There was a slight splashing alongside the blocked sub. It might have been only a frog jumping from a root. In fact, it was the slap of a broad, dark hand.

Spike and Bumps were peering intently toward where they believed the green signal flare had been. There was a thump and a grunt beside Spike. The scarred first mate pivoted just in time to see Bumps lifted by a blow and overended on the turtleback deck.

The cameraman yelled hoarsely and clung to the slippery metal, saving himself a plunge into the slimy black water. It was always Spike's principle to start a fight first and find out about it afterward. He swung at a leering dark face that loomed high above him. Big hands at the ends of long arms were reaching.

Spike's buzz-saw fists cut into a stomach. But this was no soft, yielding flesh. His knuckles might as well have been hammering on board. His ripping blows did not bring so much as a grunt. Hands with gorilla power crushed down, gripping all of Spike's small, scarred head.

Fists still flying, feet kicking, the first mate felt himself lifted from the deck. It was an unpleasant sensation. He was suspended by his neck and shaken as a terrier might have shaken a rat. His spine threatened to be snapped off.

He heard a voice with a strange accent roaring a command. Holding him at arm's length, his giant assailant kicked Spike in the stomach and let him drop. Spike rolled over in agony, joining Bumps in the effort to keep from sliding off the smooth turtleback deck.

A boat bumped the side of the submarine. Half a dozen men with clubs and shotguns were scrambling onto the deck. And at this instant, Hurricane Dan poked his head above the conning hatch to discover what had caused the sudden commotion.

"Look out, Dan!" yelled Bumps. "Get back! Grab a gun!"

HURRICANE DAN was a terrible fighter, but sometimes he was slow to think. At the moment, perhaps he saw only the big man who had downed Spike and Bumps. This was Sugar Cane, leader of the convicts.

Hurricane Dan bellowed with rage

and heaved himself part way out of the conning hatch. He did not come all the way. A convict with a shotgun was behind him. The steel barrel clunked down upon Hurricane Dan's skull with stunning force. The giant second mate fell back into the sub.

Sugar Cane was spilling orders. He pulled Bumps McCarthy to his feet and thrust him into the hands of other men. He seemed to lift Spike Briggs by the nape of his neck with nothing but his thumb and finger.

A convict in a flatboat lifted the limp figure of a girl onto the sub. Her body was wrapped with the inevitable cotton fishing line of the swamps. Bumps, seeing her, believed Dale Champeau was dead. The beautiful, dusky face was like a drooping flower and her eyes were closed.

Sugar Cane was staring at the conning hatchway. Still holding the helpless Spike, the big mulatto walked over and looked into the craft's interior. It was clear that the swamp convict had no understanding of such a boat. He could see a multitude of levers, shining discs and paneled controls.

Sugar Cane was grunting, apparently bewildered as to his next move, now that he had captured the sub. Then the swamp sounded to a motor that was silenced to a low humming. The convict leader issued a swift order and his men crouched, their guns covering an approaching boat.

Bumps saw the tall Cat Randolph in the light from the sub. He was standing in the bow of his motor boat. The Creole, Rama, stood beside him. Randolph ignored the pointed guns and let his motor boat rub alongside before he cut the motor.

Bumps hardly knew what to expect. He was aware that Cat Randolph's status had been strangely divided; that The Skipper himself had not been sure of where to place the gray-eyed swamper. Now Randolph seemed to establish that definitely.

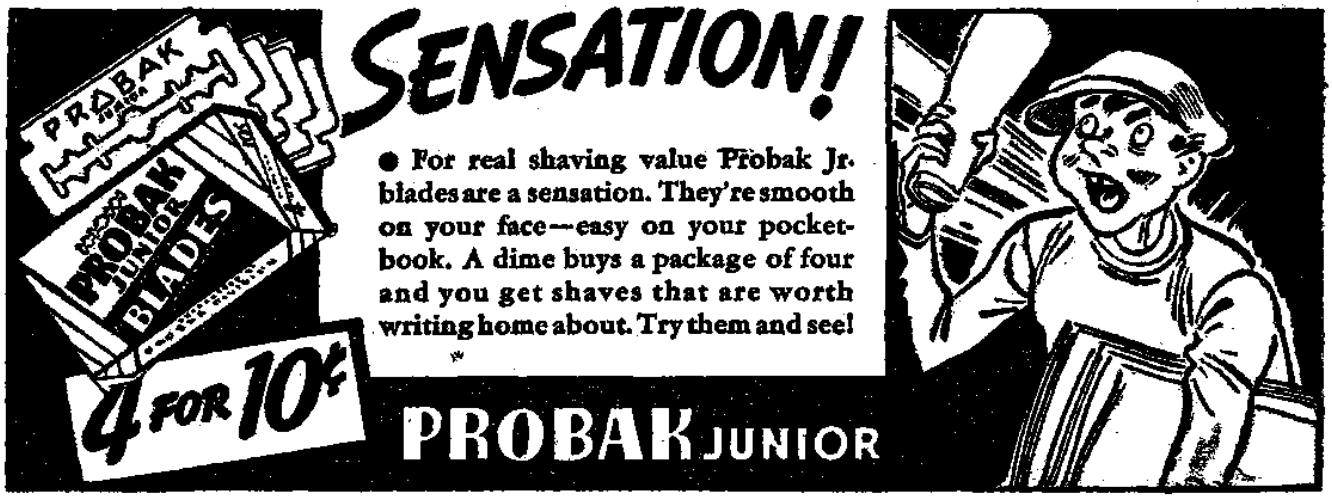
"Well, you've got something this time, Sugar Cane!" exclaimed Randolph, cheerfully. "You wouldn't expect to be picking up a submarine in the middle of Great Cypress! It's a miracle!"

The Creole woman was talking at Randolph's side. Bumps had quick eyes. He saw the cat man turn swiftly and his hands remove a gleaming necklace from the girl's neck. Randolph's low words reached the cameraman.

"Best to keep the pretties out of sight with this crowd."

Then Cat Randolph was helping Rama onto the sub. And he immediately took command, as if that was his right.

"Get these men inside the sub, Sugar Cane!" said Randolph, his eyes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straying to Spike's ragged first-mate's uniform. "Keep that one to operate the boat! He will know how to get out of here!"

Randolph looked at the unconscious Dale Champeau with cold eyes. His co-operation with her in the rescue of old Mata did not seem to include any special friendship.

"Put the Champeau woman below, Sugar Cane," he directed, calmly. "We must finish her in such a way she will not be found. But first, tie up this red-headed fellow and that other big man knocked out down there. Snap into it, Sugar Cane!"

Bumps had a glimpse of the Creole Rama's black eyes. They were like liquid pools of flaming hate as she looked at the beautiful Dale Champeau. Bumps wondered vaguely why she had this feeling toward the other girl.

IN less than five minutes, all were inside the submarine. The boats were permitted to drift away in the bayou. Bumps, Hurricane Dan and the Champeau girl were now tied up and laid on the floor. Sugar Cane with his half dozen convicts obeyed every command of Cat Randolph.

The gray-eyed swamper pushed Spike Briggs in front of the control board.

"You may live a long time, scar-face," said Randolph. "As long as you operate the sub and take orders, you'll be all right. Perhaps the boat is a find."

The cat man turned to the gaping Sugar Cane.

"Maybe we'll use this boat to play pirate along the river," he said pleasantly. "That will be better than being hounded through the swamps."

The giant Sugar Cane licked his thick lips. He muttered he wanted to get the Champeau diamonds. Then Bumps's eyes bugged.

"But I have the Champeau diamonds, Sugar Cane," stated Randolph. "We were going to find a ship to get away, but this is much better."

Randolph produced a small leather pouch. He opened it and spilled a few sparkling stones. The convicts surged around the cat man. He waved them back.

"As long as you boys remember who is boss, everything will be all right!" he snapped. "You will get your share! Here, Sugar Cane, split these up!"

The strategy was effective. Each convict was clutching three or four huge diamonds. Bumps estimated that the sack must have contained stones valued into many thousands. But all this information about Cat Randolph was doing Bumps no good.

Spike Briggs was still somewhat stupefied from the beating Sugar Cane had administered. But with the armed convicts behind him, and Cat Randolph taking in every play of his hands, he obeyed orders. Randolph could not see the deadly glitter beginning to appear in the first mate's small eyes.

The sub backed away until it could turn in a wide spot in the bayou. Spike did not speak as it glided into the big river.

"Better put her under, mister!" commanded Randolph. "Too many things have happened to-night! We wouldn't want to be attracting attention! Submerge until I decide where we will go first!"

AIR hissed from the submersion chambers. The submarine dipped its pointed nose and rolled under. Except for the government channel, the Mississippi was not deep enough above the delta for any extensive dive under the surface.

Even when the stream-lined craft touched the oozy mud of the bottom, its telescopic periscope still could be thrust above the surface. Spike operated the controls, his small eyes staring straight

ahead. The glitter was becoming more deadly with each passing minute.

Cat Randolph said, "Ease off, mister, and cruise around a bit. Just remember to stay in the clear of other boats, and nobody will get hurt."

Rama came and stood beside Randolph. She murmured, "Are you giving the diamonds to the others?"

There was a hidden threat in her voice. Spike alone could hear their exchange. The convicts and Sugar Cane were gloating over their greenish-hued jewels, rubbing them and holding them up to the light. None had the slightest idea of the value of diamonds of that size.

"Keep your temper, Rama," said Cat Randolph. "I told you we would reach a ship. This is the best way to do it. Perhaps I shall have back what I have already split up."

Something clicked in Spike's brain. Then this cat man was double-crossing the convicts in some way. That passing out of the diamonds had been merely a stop-gap to hold them peaceful for the moment. It was beyond the first mate's understanding. Randolph apparently was accepted as the convict boss, but he was making some kind of play of his own.

Rama said, "When will you get rid of the Champeau girl?"

Randolph spoke as if the fate of the girl did not concern him greatly.

"It wouldn't be best to have her body found in the river now," he said. "When we are ready to leave, well, maybe then we——"

Spike's thumb was pressing a lever, unseen. And he alone could peer into the periscope mirror against which his stomach was pressed closely. The periscope extension was now above the surface. But all that it picked up at the moment was the occasional light of a boat here and there, and the glare of Riverton lights a few miles away.

IN the meantime, The Skipper had reached the *Whirlwind*. The chains were swiftly struck from his ankles, and those of Peter, and Billy, the convict.

Billy said, "I'll be in a helluva spot when I get away."

He had been gazing with awe at the remarkable interior of the *Whirlwind*, its docked craft, the amazing, lavish furnishings of Cap Fury's cabin.

"Ever been to sea, Billy?" said The Skipper.

Billy stared at him and Cap added, "Because I believe I can use you in my crew."

The amazement of the youthful minor convict, Billy, was no greater than that of old Andre Champeau as he surveyed the fittings of the *Whirlwind*.

"You have done me a very great favor in coming, Captain Fury," he said. "A few days earlier, and all this death and destruction might have been avoided. But now——"

The old Frenchman was consumed with grief for the fate of his daughter.

"And now," said The Skipper, "the thing to be done is to strike directly and quickly at the heart of this thing. Which man of those involved in the green deaths is your greatest enemy, Champeau?"

Andre Champeau said that he did not know that surely. There was Yall Jutt, who had wanted to marry his daughter and who held mortgages on his property. Yall Jutt, who wanted his diamonds, but who did not know of the extent of the Champeau fortune.

"Hooker Suggs?" suggested Cap. "He is strangely linked with the fake voodoo ceremonies, the spread of the green plague. Where does he fit in?"

Champeau said that Hooker Suggs had not been an enemy, especially.

He added, "But Suggs only bosses the Swamp Club. The lawyer, Jutt, is the real owner."

"There is a man named Cat Randolph?" said Cap.

"No one in Riverton ever has known where Cat Randolph stood on anything," said Andre Champeau, slowly. "He has been involved in many strange enterprises. He comes of one of the oldest and best families, though he appears to be but a swamper."

THE SKIPPER could read another man's thoughts. He was instantly aware that Champeau was holding something back, something that concerned Cat Randolph. Champeau had changed the subject quickly.

"Judge Thatcher is crooked," he said. "He is dominated by Yall Jutt. While Hooker Suggs is not much more than a strong-arm man, Judge Thatcher has brains. I myself am responsible for the voodoo story, starting it as a joke some years ago. It has been only recently that the story was picked up and this epidemic of murder and death began."

The Skipper nodded. He said to Champeau, "You will rest in one of my cabins. We will do what we can to find your daughter. Do you think your friend, Mayor Samuel Pound, might know directly who is the brains behind all this?"

Champeau shook his head.

"Sam Pound is the usual politician, Cap Fury," he said. "A lot of noise, but not much behind it. He has always had great ambitions, and he has been especially friendly to the older families, because it has been good politics. However, those who founded the town have not always favored Sam Pound, and I don't know that they would give him their votes to become governor."

The Skipper nodded. He was thinking fast. A minute later, he was beside Champeau in a well-fitted cabin. The old man was not aware that Cap's hands had shot toward his neck. Thumbs pressed ganglions of the great nerves at the base of the skull.

Cap had judged it would be best for Champeau to sleep soundly for many hours, for The Skipper had suddenly mapped a desperate course in which he desired no interference.

When Champeau was asleep, Cap went directly to the laboratory. There, he summoned the convict Billy.

"Willing to try an experiment?" he said. "I guarantee it will be harmless."

"I'm one that'll go all the way for you, Captain Fury," said the recent convict.

A needle went into his arm. Only seconds later, Billy's face had become a ghastly green. He shook with fear as he saw himself in a mirror.

"But you are not ill and you will not be," assured Cap.

CHAPTER XII.

SMASHING HOOKER SUGGS.

THOUGH it was coming now toward morning, it seemed that no citizen of Riverton had slept during that fateful, death-packed night. The leaders of the mob that had been turned back from the Champeau island were assembled with other hardy spirits in the Swamp Club of Hooker Suggs. Liquor flowed freely.

Even the ague-ridden Judge Thatcher was awake. He was seated with some other men at one of the club tables, and it was apparent that a mixture of quinine pills and whisky had made the judge very drunk. Hooker Suggs was standing, as usual, with his steel hook resting upon the bar.

There was balked question in Hooker's eyes, as if he were trying to find some solution to the disastrous events of the night. He called one of his men over.

"Any word from Rama yet?" he inquired in a low voice.

"The boys say she went away with Cat Randolph," said the man.

Hooker Suggs swore. He said, "It is about time Randolph keeps his agreement with me. If he is found, I want him brought directly to my office in the

back. He was to bring—well—fetch him in, that's all!"

It was possible that Hooker Suggs was thinking of the Champeau diamonds. It might have been that the cat man had an agreement to bring the jewels to Hooker. His conversation with the Creole Rama had indicated he might be double-crossing Hooker.

Chief of Police Ulan was in the club, at a table with a number of his men. The fat-faced chief also was drinking. Occasionally, he boasted.

"As soon as it comes daylight, I'll have the boats out and find that damned submarine that blew up the causeway!" he promised.

Another man said, "I don't know whether that would be smart. Me, I'm staying away from the river. Maybe the government boys have stepped in."

"The government don't blow up no causeways!" rapped Chief Ulan. "We would know if there are government men in town!"

Chief Ulan's small eyes surveyed all strangers in the club. But it was impossible to classify all of the river roustabouts, the transient workmen from the oil field. Chief Ulan overlooked altogether two men who had entered and rolled directly to the bar.

One of these men was short and swarthy, with fat cheeks and a double chin. Gold earrings dangled from his lobes, and he wore a colorful suit. His eyes and hair were coal black, and he jabbered with an Italian accent. It seemed he was trying to sell a boatload of bananas to the tall, Scandinavian-appearing fellow with him.

The tall man had bleached, white eyebrows and long, straight blond hair. His accent bespoke him for a Swede or perhaps a Norwegian. The pair argued volubly and loudly. They bellied up to the bar and the Italian made a fuss because he could not get the kind of wine he requested. But he compromised on straight whisky.

NONE in that room could ever have guessed that Captain John Fury and the funereal Peter Doom were the Italian and the Swede. The Skipper's adeptness at make-up did not go halfway. He changed the color of eyes and hair as easily as he changed clothes.

The oratorical voice of Mayor Samuel Pound boomed out. He had come in and stood beside Judge Thatcher's table. Every one in the room became silent.

"I'm telling you, Judge Thatcher, that we must start in the morning to make a thorough clean-up of lawlessness!" proclaimed Mayor Pound. "My car was wrecked to-night! Hundreds might have been killed! I am of the opinion our trouble is coming from the river! There is a tanker——"

Judge Thatcher's sallow face was flaming with liquor. He nodded his head in owlish agreement.

The Skipper apparently saw a bottle of wine, and indicated it to the flat-faced bartender with a wave of his hand. The bartender placed the bottle before him. Cap's left hand moved with lightning speed. Perhaps the bartender felt something sting his wrist, perhaps not.

Cap Fury looked contemptuously at the bottle of wine set before him. He jabbered out with a strong Italian accent, "Notta that one!" His hand hit the bottle and sent it flying off the bar, and oaths in Italian poured from his lips.

The disturbance turned all eyes in the room toward the bar. Back in the room, a man yelled, "It's come again! Joe's got it! I'm gettin'——"

Hooker Suggs was staring at the bartender called Joe. The man was cursing Cap for knocking the bottle off the bar. He did not seem to understand what was wrong. But Hooker Suggs and the others saw that Joe's face was turning to a bright greenish hue. He did not appear to be sick, for his streaming oaths belied that.

The crowd in the room was shuffling to its feet. There was no more amazed face than that of Hooker Suggs himself. His bright steel hook was beginning to wave.

"It can't be possible!" he yelled. "Joe, you sick?"

But at that instant, Hooker had sudden other business. The tall figure of Peter Doom slid along the bar toward him. There was menace in the light-colored Swedish eyes, and Hooker saw it. His steel hook whipped up and came around.

But Peter's long arm with a knobbed fist shot past the deadly hook. It flattened Hooker's nose, hurling him to his haunches. None then noted the movement of the swarthy Italian, Cap Fury. The Skipper was squirming into the crowd. He was making straight for Judge Thatcher's table.

Chief Ulan was the first to hear Judge Thatcher cry out. Then the eminent victim of swamp ague drooped his head forward. Cap's fingers had trapped the back of his skinny neck and squeezed. The judge was out.

"Over to the judge!" yelled Chief Ulan. "Get that Italian! Some of you grab Joe!"

But none was anxious to approach the green-faced bartender, who was still standing in stupid bewilderment. Then a shrill whistle sounded. It was like the signal employed by a ship's boatswain. The crowd had been surging toward the four doors of the Swamp Club. All the furies seemed to burst upon them.

HALF a dozen men to each door, their tough faces grinning with the joy of the chance, more than a score of sailors from the *Whirlwind* burst into the club. None seemed to be armed with other than his havoc-creating fists, and they came into the big barroom of the Swamp Club in the form of four solid wedges.

Tougher fighting men never lived. They were outnumbered ten to one as the doors broke open. But as they laid out the first men they reached and chairs started swinging, the tough crew formed its wedges into one solid mass that swept the crowd before it.

Mayor Samuel Pound climbed to a table, shouting. A sailor yanked the table from under him and the ponderous politician hit the floor.

Now the Swamp Club had some tough bouncers. Soon there were half a dozen fights in progress. Slugging matches that bloodied faces. Bouncers attempted to use blackjacks and guns. They had their own weapons rapped over their heads.

Having knocked out Hooker Suggs, Peter Doom edged away from the roaring mêlée. His tall figure darted behind the bar. One bartender got in his way and went smashing into the mirror. Bottles crashed and a stream of alcohol poured over the floor. Peter smashed a bottle into the low, palm-thatched roof.

Then a flame leaped out. Some one shouted, "Fire! The place is burning!"

The fighting then became a whirling bedlam. Except for the flames jumping along the roof of the Swamp Club, all the lights blinked out.

None then saw the lank figure of Judge Thatcher swung over one mighty shoulder. The Skipper's signal whistle rang through the place. In a few seconds, those seeking to escape the fire were battering at each other.

Trained to the second, the *Whirlwind* sailors were vanishing.

The Swamp Club was a blazing mass, surrounded by yelling, cursing men as the men from the *Whirlwind* rolled down one of the dark alleys toward a canal. Cap Fury carried Judge Thatcher's limp body over his shoulder. The worthy judge would not be bothered by either the fever or the chills for many hours. He had been put to sleep.

Loaded with the tough *Whirlwind*

crew, the stream-lined boat held in waiting glided out into the river. But at this time, Hooker Suggs had recovered from the smashing fist of Peter Doom. The Swamp Club operator was running with the lighter figure of Yall Jutt, the lawyer, beside him.

The pair arrived in the alley leading to the canal. They were on the canal levee just in time to catch the gleam of the mirrorlike boat making out into the river.

"So that's the answer!" roared Hooker Suggs with a string of oaths. "The whole mess-up has come from that damned tanker, boss! I've been hearing there's a smart sea captain called Fury, and we've got to stop this stuff or we're licked!"

"We'll line up Ulan's force!" said Yall Jutt. "They've got Judge Thatcher, and if he talks——"

HOOKER SUGGS and Jutt knew nothing of the difficulties that might lie in their way in stopping the stuff of Captain John Fury.

But shortly after the stream-lined boat had reached the *Whirlwind*, Spike Briggs was still standing rigidly at the controls of the submarine. For more than three hours the first mate had apparently been in abject fear of Cat Randolph and the convicts.

At this moment, Sugar Cane himself was standing beside Spike, a pistol touching the first mate's ribs. Randolph had been talking with Rama. His cool, gray eyes had been watching the convicts. He seemed to be plotting some method of getting rid of Sugar Cane and his men.

The Creole Rama whispered, "If they were gone, Cat, we could get away with the diamonds. Maybe up the river to Memphis or St. Louis."

"That's an idea," stated Randolph. "I'll take over control."

Cat Randolph moved lithely over to Sugar Cane, taking the pistol that had been menacing Spike.

"We're making for a landing, Sugar Cane," said Randolph. "You boys will want some whisky. It's a place I know."

Sugar Cane's thick lips grinned. Randolph pushed the pistol into Spike's side. The sub was cruising slowly, had been making wide circles in the big river, keeping under the surface.

"You've been using the periscope," said the cat man unexpectedly. "So you know where we are. Now I want you to head upriver."

Spike muttered, "Aye! Aye! But the periscope don't show anything!"

Spike moved over and indicated the mirror. Randolph could see nothing but a little dot of light here and there.

"All right!" snapped Randolph. "If you can follow a course without that thing, make it upriver!"

Spike's grubby hands whirled controls. The sub took on hissing life. It was moving swiftly on its tubes. But Randolph did not see the little vibration needle swing in its balance. The faint clicking that came from somewhere in the mechanism meant nothing to the cat man.

It was well for Spike that the cat man did not understand all the various gadgets. For Spike had made a contact, found what he was seeking. He was now following a radio beam that was heading the sub straight for the *Whirlwind*.

RAMA came over and stood beside Cat Randolph. The pistol eased away from Spike's side. Now only Spike was looking into the periscope mirror. His small, glittering eyes were the only pair that picked up the suddenly appearing riding lights of the old *Whirlwind*.

Spike's thumb flicked a tiny lever. Only he knew that it was an emergency message to those aboard the old tanker. Almost immediately, there appeared di-

rectly ahead of the sub what seemed to be a gaping mouth of a tunnel with lights inside.

Spike's hands moved. The submarine surged forward with a rush that jolted Cat Randolph backward. The Creole Rama cried out as her feet went from under her. There was the sound of water gurgling from submersion tanks and the sub was shooting to the surface, gaining tremendous speed.

The convicts were flung back in the cabin. All except Sugar Cane, whose big body went into a sudden crouch.

It was Sugar Cane who had the quick instinct to understand that something was wrong. He let out a snarling oath, hurling himself with smashing fists upon Spike. At the same instant, it seemed that Cat Randolph sensed trouble.

"Why, you scar-faced double-crosser!" he shouted.

The automatic pistol in his hand cracked twice, sharply. Spike felt Sugar Cane's driving fists force his head between his shoulders. But the scarred first mate was hanging onto the controls. That opening ahead was the dockage space of the old *Whirlwind*. He had to hold the sub head-on.

If he deviated a point either way, the sub's speed would smash into and through the sides of the old tanker, or crumple the nose of the sub and sink them in the river. It was an even bet which would happen.

The rusty old plates of the *Whirlwind* were of the finest armor plate. The submarine was equally shell and shock-proof. Something would have to smash.

Spike's chin struck a metal control, but still he hung on grimly, his glittering eyes fixed upon the periscope view of the *Whirlwind* opening. Then the sub was on the surface, shooting along. It was then that Spike became aware that Sugar Cane's huge fists had ceased to hammer.

And though Randolph's pistol had been fired twice, no bullets seemed to have hit him. But so many slugs had been embedded in Spike from one time to another, he could not be sure now. He had tried twisting away from the flame of the pistol.

Sugar Cane had ceased striking the first mate. He was lying on the floor with blood running over his thick lips. Apparently, he had jumped between the cat man and Spike just as the weapon exploded.

AS the sub's nose lifted slightly, its sleek hull taking the lift on a swift run into the *Whirlwind's* dockage space, Rama, the Creole, let out a scream of rage.

"I know, Cat! You would save her! I've thought so all the time!"

She came from the floor where she had been flung. A stiletto with a needle point glittered in her right hand. She sprang across the small cabin, hurling her sinuous body upon the recumbent form of the helpless Dale Champeau. The slicing blade was set to drive into the other girl's heart.

It appeared that Cat Randolph might have acted, but two of the convicts had got the idea that the killing of Sugar Cane had not been an accident. The pair were rushing upon the cat man, and their bodies jolted into Spike, knocking the first mate completely out as his chin jammed into the control panels.

Dale Champeau screamed. Bumps McCarthy, lying beside Hurricane Dan, was the closest, but both his arms and legs were bound with cotton fishing cord. Nevertheless, the red-headed cameraman acted. His movement was an instinctive jerking of his body until he balanced on the back of his neck. From this position, he shot forward, his bound feet in the air.

Bumps's heels crashed squarely into the face of the lovely Rama. Her straight nose squashed under the impact, and her lower jaw snapped. The

hard heels ripped the flesh off as the screaming Creole struck with the stiletto.

The blade had been aimed at the smooth throat of Dale Champeau. But for the prompt battering-ram action of Bumps, it would have been a death blow. But the stiletto flashed to one side, its aim diverted. Bumps let out a groan as the steel entered the thick part of his leg and grated on bone.

In spite of this, the cameraman again kicked Rama in the face. The dancer never again would entertain because of her perfect features.

CHAPTER XIII.

GREEN-FACED SAILORS.

FEW were the cords ever devised that would confine the Herculean arms and legs of mighty Hurricane Dan Belmont. It must have seemed to Hurricane Dan that he had been awakened in the midst of a nightmare.

The submarine shot into the *Whirlwind.* Automatic devices checked its furious speed, though the landing hurled those inside to the forward end of the cabin. At that instant, the sinews of Hurricane Dan set themselves. Cotton fishing cord snapped as if it had been sewing thread.

Hurricane Dan lashed out with a fist at the first face coming within range. It was that of Cat Randolph, just rolling away from two convicts who had attacked him. But few men had ever been struck such a blow. The head of the cat man rocked back and crashed into the plated side of the cabin.

Cat Randolph would be unconscious for many long hours. Only a hard skull saved his life.

Those free, and those bound inside the submarine, were in inextricable confusion for the moment. Adding to this, the sub's lights went out. The conning hatch door was being unscrewed. It slid back in its oiled grooves.

Cap Fury himself led the men of his crew inside. Lights came on. With Peter Doom shouldering beside him, The Skipper smashed right and left at the heads of those convicts remaining conscious. Members of the crew were lifting Dale Champeau, carrying her out. Her father was soon to awaken to a joyful reunion.

When the convicts were subdued and had been placed in the dungeon brig of the *Whirlwind,* Cap Fury turned his attention to Cat Randolph. The cat man was placed in a cabin, but he refused to respond to any stimulant. The Skipper removed a dozen leather sacks from the man's clothing.

Peter Doom was beside him. Bumps McCarthy was telling what had happened in Great Cypress Swamp.

"From what I heard, I imagine this Cat Randolph must have been sent by Hooker Suggs to steal the Champeau diamonds," stated Bumps. "Then he and that dancing dame planned to beat it with the stones."

Rama then was sleeping after a hasty job of surgery, which never could restore the beauty destroyed by the heels of Bumps McCarthy.

Cap said nothing for the moment. He opened one sack, then another. The sparkling stones of greenish hue trickled over his fingers. He picked up the necklace that Cat Randolph had given Rama. There was a cryptic smile on The Skipper's mouth.

"Perhaps Cat Randolph was double-crossing Hooker Suggs," he said then. "But Hooker isn't the only one who was being double-crossed. That same brand of diamonds is to be had for a dollar a dozen, or less, at any costume jewelry shop."

Peter Doom's solemn head nodded. The ex-copper was an expert on stones.

"They're one damned good job," he said. "But I could tell they were fakes the instant I saw them."

THUS, one more puzzle was added to the mysterious Cat Randolph. The cat man had taken Rama to the depths of Great Cypress, led her into a queer treasure vault, only to come away with imitation diamonds that were not worth risking the anger of Hooker Suggs.

"Perhaps this old Champeau had been very smart," stated Peter Doom. "He was smart enough to start that voodoo story that turned sour on him. Maybe he's been fooling a lot of people with the paste rocks."

The Skipper shook his head.

"I believe it remains for Cat Randolph to do the explaining," he said. "But we have no time to waste on this. Unless I am mistaken, the vibrators tell us that visitors are on the way. We will have Billy and the sailors lined up."

Whatever Cap may have meant by "lining up" Billy and the sailors, The Skipper was under the wheelhouse bridge of the anchored tanker as bright lights of a fast boat of the police-cruiser type flashed along the old ship's rusty sides. Cap walked over to the rail, peering down. And as the boat came closer, a sailor suddenly appeared in the light, waving a huge flag in one hand.

The flag was red. Cap shouted, "Stand off! Unless you want to run into a plague! We are under quarantine!"

Chief of Police Ulan was standing on the little deck of the police cruiser. A rapid-fire gun of heavy caliber was mounted close to him. A dozen of his straw-hatted policemen were swarming out. They held grappling hooks and ladders; and it was apparent they had every intention of boarding the ship.

"Whoever is captain of this tub," yelled Chief Ulan, "we've got a warrant to search your cargo!"

At this moment, four sailors and Billy, the freed convict, staggered to the rail not far from Cap. The police boat's light flared upon them. Two of the sailors hung briefly over the rail, then slumped to the deck. One sailor screamed, tearing at his throat.

Apparently, before The Skipper could prevent him, this screaming sailor jumped clear over the rail, splashing into the river below. The policemen with Chief Ulan were dropping their grappling ladders. Chief Ulan was staring, open-mouthed.

For the faces of the four sailors, of Billy, were a deadly green. One policeman shouted, "That's where the plague has been coming from! We can't go aboard!"

Cap said, "I warned you to stand off! We have many men sick, but they contracted the green plague in your city!"

Chief Ulan was raging helplessly. His men were all for pulling away from the pestilential tanker.

"You will get this damned tramp ship out of the river, out into the Gulf!" yelled Chief Ulan. "If you don't weigh anchor at once, we have every right and authority to sink you! We'll turn loose with the heavy gun!"

Cap smiled grimly. The heavy gun on the police boat might easily have pierced rusty old plates of an oil tanker. But a bean shooter would have had about as much effect upon the armored sides of the old *Whirlwind*.

"By all the green hells!" rumbled Peter at Cap's elbow.

ANDRE CHAMPEAU had been awakened and was coming onto the deck from the cabin. Spike Briggs was close beside him, hurrying to The Skipper with a message of his own.

"By the great hornspoon!" exclaimed Spike. "That radio has been callin' for a mass meeting of them Riverton swabs! That lubber Pound is gettin' the citizens together on a steamboat called the *Mary Belle!* They are to be there when the sun rises!"

Old Champeau spoke. There was a new light in his eyes.

"I have seen my daughter, Captain Fury," he said gratefully. "You have accomplished a miracle. But I must warn you. The radio said more down in the cabin. Sam Pound has wired for a light government cruiser that's been in the river below New Orleans! The news flash said he had reported a band of pirates aboard your ship, an oil tanker called the *Whirlwind!*"

Cap Fury merely nodded. His keen, blue eyes were fixed on the police cruiser. He saw a good-looking face appear in the cabin hatchway. There was the flash of a bright steel hook. Hooker Suggs had been concealed on board the police boat.

Chief Ulan bellowed, "So you have old Champeau up there! And we are sure you have kidnaped Judge Thatcher! Before your ship moves, we demand that you produce the judge! Otherwise, our big gun will be turned upon you!"

"We will move out of the river into the Gulf!" called Cap unexpectedly. "Yes, we have Judge Thatcher on board! He is sleeping! I never disturb my guests!"

Hooker Suggs came out openly on the police-boat deck, shaking his steel hook.

"At last, I know you, Captain Fury!" he bellowed. "I'll give the word to blast a few holes in your rotten old tub if you do not release Judge Thatcher! You will bring him up and swim him aboard our boat! We are not coming onto your death-ship!"

The Skipper's square-fingered hands spread as if he accepted the command. He spoke a quick word to Spike Briggs.

"You shall have Judge Thatcher!" he grated. "That is, if you want him! He is being brought up! Make ready for him on the police boat!"

Big Hurricane Dan brought up Judge Thatcher. The scrawny body of the police judge, the ague-ridden magistrate of Riverton, was being transported in a manner that brought gasped oaths from the police cruiser. For the curve of a long boat hook was snagged into Judge Thatcher's belt. Upheld by the giant arms of Hurricane Dan, the unconscious man dangled not unlike a mullet on a spear.

"Great hell!" spilled from the mouth of a straw-hatted policeman who stood beside the heavy gun on the cruiser. "He's got it! Chief, get 'em out of the river!"

Judge Thatcher's once sallow face was a sinister mask of green. His skin was mottled, and the whites of his eyes showed as if he were dead. Even Hooker Suggs was shaken.

Hooker squawked, "They've killed the judge! He's dead of the green plague! Hold off! Let them have it, and blast the tanker at the water line!"

As their gaze fixed upon the grotesque figure of Judge Thatcher, none noticed that Captain Fury had vanished from the rail. His place was taken by Spike Briggs, Hurricane Dan and others of his crew.

It was the scarred Spike who spat out an oath.

"Shoot an' be damned to you!" he squealed. "But before you do, have one last look around before we send you to Davy Jones's locker!"

THAT heavy-caliber police gun let go before the order could be countermanded. Its jacketed shell tore into the old *Whirlwind* at close range. By all rules of ballistics, it should have pierced the rusty plates, gone through the hull and perhaps bursted a boiler.

But that shell actually bounced as it flattened. It had met the finest of armored, shell-proof steel masquerading under that black rust. And at the same instant, the top of one of the seeming ancient oil-tank turrets divided. Hooker

Suggs and Chief Ulan gulped oaths as they found themselves looking into the neat, black throats of twin guns entirely capable of blowing the police cruiser out of the water.

"Now, damn your eyes!" squealed Spike. "We're getting out of the river, as you said! Weigh anchor, boys!"

There was nonplused, momentary confusion upon the police cruiser. The appearance of the menacing guns, the failure to make so much as a dent in this amazing old tramp ship had frozen the police gunner.

The *Whirlwind's* anchor was coming from the river mud. None noticed the absence of Captain Fury. The Skipper had whipped down into the cabin. His great boots came off, but he patted each of his sleeves. He did not waste time going down the ladder, but made a clean dive into the yellow water.

Chief Ulan was bawling, "Well, we'll get 'em out of the river! With what we've seen, we'll have a government boat blast them to hell!"

"It wouldn't be advisable!" gritted a cold, steelly voice. "Put up your hands, or would you like a nice blue hole over your eye?"

The Skipper stood on the after deck of the police cruiser with yellow water streaming over his hard-jawed face. He held a flat, blue gun in each hand. These seemed to point at each of the dozen or more men on the police boat.

Mouths dripped curses. But Chief Ulan knew death when he saw it, and he set the example by shoving his fat hands into the air. But Hooker Suggs dropped to the deck, rolled and came up behind a capstan. His bright steel hook whipped into the air, almost as if the ghastly thing would come loose and could be thrown at the cold-eyed Skipper.

One blue gun erupted with a dry crackle. One bullet came from it. The steel hook went higher in the air, as a man might have thrown a hand when a slug has nipped a chunk from the socket bone of his shoulder. Cap stood on braced, socked feet, unmoving.

"The grappler, Spike!" he commanded. "Come an' get 'em!"

A DOUBLE grappling hook operated on a telescopic extension shot out from the *Whirlwind*. It was like a giant, iron hand. The police cruiser crunched into the plates of the tanker, even as the old ship started moving slowly down the big river.

The Skipper himself had one gun in the back of Hooker Suggs's neck.

"Splitting your crooked spine will be a pleasure, Hooker Suggs," he said, softly. "You're alive only because you have some talking to do!"

"I'll see you polecats in hell before I——"

But Cap's steel thumb and forefinger suddenly were clamped upon a spot under Hooker's right ear. Hooker's cracked shoulder was bleeding but little. His steel hook hit the deck. Hooker Suggs had to be hoisted by the rough hands of the *Whirlwind* crew.

Chief Ulan was sputtering like a Fourth of July candle.

"None of you damned pirates will get away!" he roared down in the cabin. "All Riverton knows Andre Champeau brought the green plague because him and his kind could not run the town! The government cruiser has been sent for, and when it overtakes this filthy tub in the Gulf, it will——"

Hurricane Dan used only the back of one black, hairy hand. But it spun Chief Ulan a dozen feet.

"Callin' the *Whirlwind* a filthy tub!" mellowed Hurricane Dan. "I'll learn you swabs!"

Above deck, the old *Whirlwind* was exactly as Chief Ulan had described it, but that did not prevent Hurricane Dan from having his pride. The policemen

and the sleeping Hooker Suggs were escorted through the cabin of The Skipper. There even Chief Ulan's mouth gaped open. It was like stepping suddenly from some rotting oil dock into the palace of a king.

Chief Ulan became suddenly very silent. Then he was swearing under his breath. For he saw Judge Thatcher again. And Judge Thatcher had been awakened. Though his face was still a livid, green mask, the judge was walking ahead of two sailors and showing no other evidence of being sick.

Billy, the former convict, and two other sailors with green faces stood in the cabin and grinned broadly as the prisoners were pushed past them. None of the *Whirlwind* crew seemed to have the least fear of this weird manifestation of the green death.

Chief Ulan knew that he and his men had been tricked. He thought perhaps the faces of Judge Thatcher and the others had been painted. But it was deeper than that. The color was the result of the harmless chemical injection devised by The Skipper.

"By my sacred aunt!" rumbled Peter Doom close to Cap. "You think they have a government cruiser on the way!"

The Skipper had been at the radio for a short time.

"The cruiser is helling it down the river from New Orleans," he said, calmly. "It is hitting around thirty-five knots. We have some sixty miles clearance, and that is easy enough."

Peter Doom frowned heavily. True, the *Whirlwind* could double the speed of a government cruiser on its tubular power. But the government was the government. Once in the Gulf of Mexico, a general radio alarm could bring every Federal craft afloat swarming across the defined channels which the *Whirlwind* must follow.

Cap's broad mouth wore a tight grin.

"We'll make it, Peter," he assured. "But first, the sun is coming up and we are on our way to look in on a mass meeting."

CHAPTER XIV.

KIDNAPED STEAMBOAT.

SWEAT broke out on Peter Doom's face. He always perspired freely when he was worried. Bumps McCarthy stood close by with a broad grin ornamenting his round face.

"Boy, howdy!" he chortled. "Never had a chance to shoot a film of a battleship chasin' another ship! That'll be something!"

"A cruiser isn't a battleship, you half-wit!" rapped Peter.

"It'll serve the purpose, copper!" said Bumps cheerfully.

Andre Champeau said to The Skipper, as the *Whirlwind* left a scuttled police cruiser and headed down the muddy river, "I am afraid you have run into complications. I know Chief Ulan and Judge Thatcher were politically crooked, but I cannot yet see your solution. Wouldn't it be best to set us all ashore and make your escape from the Mississippi, at least while you have the time?"

There was a deep glint in the Arctic-blue eyes of Captain Fury. He was looking at the red ball of the sun coming up in the east, shooting its first struggling rays across the wilderness of the delta region. Against this dawn fire was outlined the high, three-decked steamer *Mary Belle*.

The old-fashioned steamboat was anchored just below the Main Street levee wharf of Riverton.

"Before we leave the river, we shall have other guests, Champeau," was all the explanation Cap supplied.

The old tanker was clanking along on its wheezy old engine. Black dots along the levees showed that the whole town of Riverton must have been watching for the return of the police cruiser. The

cruiser now rested in the mud at the bottom.

The *Mary Belle* steamboat was already thronged with citizens. It was true that Mayor Samuel Pound had called a mass meeting. He included every one in the call. The ponderous, oratorical Mayor Pound announced that he proposed to settle once and for all the responsibility for the green deaths, for the reign of terror. There were blue bloods from the shuttered houses about equally represented with swampers, oil workers and others boarding the three-decked *Mary Belle,* where she lay moored by manila lines to the levee wharf.

The mass meeting had been called on the steamer, because of the closing of halls and meeting places in the city during the plague. Possibly, the ambitious Mayor Pound saw a great boost for his governorship aspirations in case he could clean up the source of the town's terror.

Yall Jutt, the lawyer, was sticking close to Mayor Pound.

"The Champeaus were burned out by the convicts," said Mr. Jutt. "I think they fled to the swamps, or perhaps the convicts got them. Perhaps that is as good a solution as any."

Others of those gathered for the meeting were listening.

"It is indeed regrettable!" boomed Pound. "The Champeaus were my friends! Even though I must admit the witchcraft of their old Negro crone may have been responsible for these green deaths! I have called this meeting to get concerted action against lawlessness! We must form posses to round up the escaped convicts, to search for the Champeaus!"

Among the blue bloods, there were nods of approval. Growls of dissent came from the swamp-angel element. Yall Jutt swore venomously.

"If the Champeaus are alive, they will never be able to stay in Riverton!" he proclaimed, and he was greeted by the applause of the swampers.

NONE had slept that night in Riverton. So as the sun rose, there were at least five hundred citizens thronging upon the steamboat *Mary Belle.*

Mayor Pound at last mounted a bale of cotton set on the lower foredeck. He looked at the lines of faces on the three decks and his chest swelled with importance.

"My fellow citizens," proclaimed the oratorical voice, "I have called you together——"

"Hiya!" yelled a voice from the levee. "Chief Ulan and Hooker Suggs are bringing in that old tanker! Now we'll know who the hell caused all the trouble last night! We'll find out about Judge Thatcher!"

Roaring shouts cut off Mayor Pound's bid for law, for his own announced hope that he would become governor. The hundreds on the *Mary Belle* crowded to the side facing the wide river. Yells went up along the levee.

For the rusty old tramp ship was gliding slowly down the shore. Her ancient engines were clanking. All could see the figure of Chief of Police Ulan standing upon the high bridge of the ship. It seemed that their doughty chief must have captured the tanker. None could be aware that Chief Ulan could see a neat, blue gun pointed at his body, and that he had not the slightest doubt that a slug would end his career if he made the wrong move.

Chief Ulan waved a hand toward the shore, when commanded by Cap Fury. Concealed on the decks, sailors commanded by Spike were preparing great iron grapplers. The three-decked steamboat was pulling at her lines, and pole fenders held her some twenty feet from the levee. Two gangplanks crossed this space.

It must have seemed to the crowds, shouting, cursing, already picking up

the handiest weapons in spite of Mayor Pound's plea for law and order, that Chief Ulan was himself bringing the tanker to a dockage. Now the old tramp ship ground her rusty plates along the levee pilings. The high prow of the ship was perhaps fifty yards above the *Mary Belle.*

But few had left the steamboat. Suddenly, some one saw the figure of old Andre Champeau on the deck beside his beautiful daughter, Dale. There was an instant roar of mob rage.

"The Champeaus. Have they got Mata? Kill them! Burn them in the square!"

THE ponderous Mayor Pound was shouting, waving his hands.

"No! No! My fellow citizens!" bawled Mayor Pound. "We must have no more violence! I have summoned the government cruiser to take over this crew of pirates! They will be——"

It seemed that the river alongside the levees boiled with an explosion. Great white wakes leaped from the stern of the old tanker. Her rusty length took on speed, and her prow cut in between the *Mary Belle* and the wharf. The manila ropes parted like mere strings, and the two gangplanks were whipped to splintered wood.

Chief of Police Ulan was suddenly snatched from the bridge. The stocky figure of Captain Fury stood there, his big sea boots flapping.

"Out with the grapplers, Spike!" rapped his icy command.

As the tanker crashed between the steamboat and the shore, the thousands along the levee were abruptly hushed. It was over before any could realize that this was more than an ordinary collision.

For the old *Whirlwind* was shooting speed from her twin tubes. Half a dozen great hooked grapplers shot out and locked into the railings and hull of the old *Mary Belle.* The several hundred citizens on board yelled in panic. A few started jumping into the river, swimming for the levee.

But the mass of the passengers remained, for the amazing *Whirlwind* had caught up the big steamboat as if it had been a mere chip of wood. In twenty seconds, both craft were shooting far out into the river.

Mayor Samuel Pound was among those who ran to the railings, looking over at the grimy deck of the speeding tanker. His big mouth hung open.

"You can't do this!" he shouted. "A U. S. cruiser is coming down upon you! This is piracy and——"

Suddenly, the clamoring passengers realized that no government cruiser ever created would come down upon the *Whirlwind* while it was still in the Mississippi. The kidnaped steamboat was being forced ahead at a speed that sent combers breaking over its flat lower deck. It had never been designed for so many knots.

"All of yo' will be gettin' the death penalty for this!" twanged the high, unpleasant voice of Yall Jutt beside Mayor Pound. "The law——"

Clear and condemning as the stroke of a death bell rang out the hard voice of Cap Fury.

"The law, Mr. Jutt? You haven't any law in Riverton! I'll show you what the law is—the law twelve miles out! There I will be the law!"

SOMEWHERE below New Orleans, a slim, gray cruiser was pouring oily smoke from her funnels. The captain was speeding in response to the urgent call from Riverton. But he was still forty miles from his goal when the old *Whirlwind* and the kidnaped *Mary Belle* went through the middle channel of the great Mississippi delta.

Then the old tanker was in the open, green Gulf, and more speed was added. The ship piled up a wall of water at her prow that drowned out the lower deck

of the cracking, groaning steamboat. All of Mayor Pound's mass meeting was forced to flee to the dry second and third decks. All that could had crowded to the top deck.

There was one movement that promised trouble. Yall Jutt started that.

"Yo' all, listen!" he bawled out! "There's enough of us here to take the ship! Yo' who have guns, come on!"

That movement ended as suddenly as it was begun. A few green-faced sailors came and stood at the rail of the *Whirlwind*. As if that were not enough, tops of old tank turrets opened. Slim, deadly guns arose on oiled mechanism, their blue snouts winking at the massed citizens.

It was twelve miles out, perhaps half a mile for good measure, in the open, green Gulf where Captain Fury commanded an anchorage. Suddenly, the tanker glided to a stop. A hook rattled down. Grim-faced sailors lined up along the rail.

The Skipper stood on the bridge, level with the top deck of the *Mary Belle*. He was facing Mayor Samuel Pound and Yall Jutt. He could see the faces of many older and better citizens among those of the bearded, stupid swampers. Perhaps The Skipper had often envisioned a moment like this. A moment when the politically rotten law of the land might be given at least one cleansing by the keen wind of the open sea.

A slender gangplank shot out to the *Mary Belle*.

"Mayor Samuel Pound and Yall Jutt!" called out The Skipper. "You will come over to our ship alone! I would have you see what happens to greedy judges and policemen who put themselves beyond the law!"

Mayor Pound became pompous, confident. Yall Jutt was muttering oaths. There was no mistaking the temper of Spike Briggs and two sailors who stood at the slender gangplank. The citizens on the *Mary Belle* were hushed. The silence held only the vague muttering of dumb swampers.

The slimy, rusted deck of the *Whirlwind* lay well below the bulging top deck of the *Mary Belle*. The onlookers had a grand-stand seat. They jammed the rail.

"Bring out the prisoners, Hurricane Dan!" barked The Skipper.

JUDGE THATCHER was the first. His face still was green. His eyes darted about apprehensively. He started to speak as he saw Samuel Pound. Hurricane Dan booted him forward.

Hooker Suggs walked between two sailors. Hooker's eyes were as bright and deadly as the steel hook suspended at his right side. The arm was useless from the bullet wound in his shoulder.

Chief of Police Ulan was next. Mayor Samuel Pound stood close to The Skipper, mopping sweat from his big face.

"Let me inform you, Captain Fury, that you will be held to account for all this outrage!" boomed Mayor Pound, so his constituents could hear his deep voice.

"Don't worry," said Cap cheerfully. "I will make an accounting, but the ledger will balance exactly with justice, if not with the law."

Andre Champeau and Dale were at one side on the deck. Suddenly, the graceful, sinuous figure of the Creole girl, Rama, appeared. Her body was as beautiful as ever, but her face was swathed in bandages. Through these, her black eyes darted venom upon her captors.

"You will pay for this!" screamed Rama. "You——"

She was looking at Bumps McCarthy. The red-headed cameraman was busy with a movie box on a tripod. None of the several hundred citizens of Riverton, good and bad, knew what would be coming next.

Then there was a vicious oath from

Yall Jutt. There was a deeper, but more fervent one from Mayor Pound.

For The Skipper had stripped off his reefer. His cap was swept from his rusty head. He reached into the side of a turret and brought out a black leather whip with forked lashes. His powerful arm swished the whip around and the lashes cracked.

"They are ready, Hurricane Dan!" came Captain Fury's order.

Those who looked at his square face, the blazing blue of his Arctic eyes, may have been reminded of some god of wrath. Samuel Pound's eyes turned anxiously toward the distant channels of the delta, the land some twelve miles away.

All of intelligence understood that the law of the land did not extend twelve miles out. There, the authority of even the coast guard ended. Not so the government cruiser, if this should prove to be piracy.

Samuel Pound was vainly looking for the first smoke of the government cruiser.

"You are a crazy man, Captain Fury!" boomed Mayor Pound. "You will be put away for——"

"Belay it!" cracked the icy voice. "I am the master here! I am the law of the *Whirlwind!* Out here, the law cannot be bought off, intimidated or soft-soaped! I want none to speak, except those I command!"

The top of one old oil turret creaked open. A shuddering gasp ran along the *Mary Belle.* A great, ancient whipping post swung into view.

CHAPTER XV.

WHIP OF THE SEA LAW.

"NO! No! No!" cried out many voices at once.

For they saw the figure of Judge Thatcher pulled around by a sailor. The judge, who had so calmly and crookedly condemned old Mata to death as a witch, who sentenced men to the horrors of a chain gang without reasonable hearing, was being thrust toward the old whipping post.

The post was like a cross. Its teakwood frame was pitted with age. The vertical and horizontal beams were stained with the dried blood of some centuries before. Once that same post had been wet with the blood of pirates on the old Spanish Main.

But the crowd's protest went unheeded. The figure of Judge Thatcher was snapped to the post. A rusty hasp enclosed one of his wrists.

"Place Hooker Suggs there!" rapped out The Skipper. "Put him beside the judge! They make a fine pair! Rip off their shirts, Hurricane Dan! No other man but myself will whip them! You of Riverton! You are about to hear truths!"

Samuel Pound started forward, but the hard hands of a sailor ground into his big arms. Another sailor was holding a wrist of the raging Yall Jutt.

Judge Thatcher's fear-filled voice rang out.

"You will be hanged for this! You can't do this to me! No man can invoke the law of the dark ages!"

His words were cut off by an icy, chilling laugh. That laugh came from The Skipper. The black whip writhed in the air. The forked lashes cut viciously across the back of Judge Thatcher. The skin separated into great welts. Judge Thatcher screamed, for he was not a man of nerve.

The whip swished again almost instantly. This time, the forked lashes wrapped around the thick neck of Hooker Suggs, whose shirt had been torn from his shoulders.

Hooker Suggs had greater grit. His thick body heaved as blood welled under the lashes, ran down his broad back. His right arm, with the mechanism of the steel hook attached below his elbow,

beat at the post. Terrible oaths came from his lips.

Dale Champeau buried her face in her hands. Her father soothed her.

"Stop it, Captain Fury!" cried out old Champeau. "My affairs are not worth it!"

"The affairs of the people are worth much more!" snapped The Skipper, and the whip slashed again across Judge Thatcher's bare back.

As the crooked judge screamed again, Captain Fury started talking.

"Tell who it was really controlled your court, Thatcher! Tell these good citizens why you pronounced sentences without trial! Tell them why you would have sent an old Negress to her death to strike at the Champeaus!"

"No! I'll never talk! I'll——"

THE whip swished again. It cut across the backs of both men held at the post.

"Who was it gave you orders, Thatcher? You, Suggs? Who was it sought the fortune of the Champeaus? Who was it concocted the virus of the green death to create a prejudice and make it appear the plague came from voodoo rites? Who was it had the Creole woman, Rama, pose as old Mata in the swamps? Who freed the convicts and installed crooked guards?

"Talk, Thatcher! Suggs!"

Judge Thatcher was moaning, sagging against his own wrist. Hooker Suggs was screaming curses. Cap's hard arm swung again and again.

Then Judge Thatcher broke. Words started spilling from his thin lips.

"Yes! Yes!" he screamed. "It's all true! One man wanted to run out the Champeaus and all like them! He wanted the green diamonds! He brought in the green plague! He wanted to be —he was——"

The Skipper was not quick enough, nor was a sailor, to prevent the cracking explosion of a pistol. The weapon had been snapped out by Yall Jutt. A round blot appeared on the back of Judge Thatcher's head. The body shivered, heaved and hung dead upon the single wrist.

The Skipper's flaying whip slashed out. It was at the instant that Yall Jutt had swung the pistol upon Captain Fury himself.

"Damn yo' all to hell!" screamed Jutt. "Now yo'll die——"

Swish!

Forked lashes of the whip slapped around his gun wrist. His arm was jerked high in the air. The pistol flew over the rail. The Skipper jerked the whip back, let it flow out again in a straight lash. The forks tore into Yall Jutt's scalp, bringing away bunches of hair.

"Yall Jutt?" boomed the voice of Mayor Samuel Pound. "It was Yall Jutt all the time! How was I to know he——"

"Wrong, Samuel Pound!" roared The Skipper.

The lashes of the whip changed direction. Amazed cries went up. For the forks sliced directly across the mouth of the ponderous politician who had so steadfastly and publicly defended the Champeaus. The blow from the whip was terrific.

"No!" yelled Mayor Pound, falling to his knees. "You can't do this, Captain Fury! You are committing a crime! I have fought for——"

The swishing whip split his lips. Then a great cry went up from hundreds of throats on the *Mary Belle*. Cries of rage. There were many supporters of Mayor Samuel Pound. But some had other reasons for shouting.

"The cruiser! It will stop this crazy ship captain!"

Peter Doom looked toward the delta and swore deeply. Smoke was smudging the horizon. Still hull-down over the curving Gulf, the government cruiser was heading straight for the

Whirlwind. Another ten minutes, and the tanker would be under guns—big guns—a force that even Captain Fury never opposed.

"By all the purple hells!" swore Peter Doom. "We're too late!"

CAP squinted at the smoke of the oncoming cruiser. The whip dropped from his hand.

"You deny, Samuel Pound, that you are the boss of the green death?" he said with deadly calm.

"Yes! Yes! You are talking crazy, Captain Fury! I have always defended Andre Champeau! I did not believe in the witch stuff! I am a law-abiding man!"

Mayor Pound was looking at Yall Jutt. The lawyer had been knocked to the deck by a sailor. He lay there senseless.

"You deny," said The Skipper, "that you wanted to marry Dale Champeau yourself, and that you knew Champeau and the best citizens could block you from becoming governor? You deny these things?"

"So help me!" blustered Samuel Pound through writhing, bloody lips.

"Then you wouldn't know about *this!*" thundered Captain Fury.

He was beside Hooker Suggs. His quick hands snapped loose the socket of the steel hook that took the place of a right hand. As he turned with the gruesome object, he whirled it over. Those close to him could see a lever that was like a trigger. They saw a shining tube suddenly jump from the bend of the steel hook.

The Skipper pointed the curved hook at Samuel Pound's face.

"A funny steel hook, it is!" he snapped out. "And when I press this little lever, it shoots like a gun, a powerful airgun, Samuel Pound! So——"

Mayor Samuel Pound seemed to have shrunk in size. He fell groveling to the rusty plates of the deck. His great voice no longer was oratorical. It had become a hoarse scream.

"Don't shoot the thing!" he squawled so all of the hundreds could hear. "It's the great death! Don't do that to me!"

"No!" rapped out The Skipper. "I'll not do that to you, Samuel Pound! Not as you had Hooker Suggs spread the green plague! As he shot the virus darts into convicts, into Champeau's Negro driver, into a man in his own Swamp Club, into others!

"You see, I have some of the darts! I knew that Hooker Suggs was always close by when the green plague struck! And you were paying him, Samuel Pound! Paying him with green diamonds that came from the Champeaus! Only that was a great mistake, one over which you should laugh!"

The crowd on the *Mary Belle* again was hushed. This incredible denounce-

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ment had paralyzed Samuel Pound's followers. They had heard him confess to knowing how the horrible green death had been spread. It meant that he, the mayor of the city, posing as a friend of the Champeaus, had been willing to commit many murders to attain political triumph.

"The diamonds?" old Andre Champeau was saying. "Why, they——"

"YES!" interrupted The Skipper. "Hooker Suggs was being paid off in paste stones not worth more than a few dollars! He did not know that, because he was afraid to let it be known he had them! He imagined Cat Randolph was in the pay of Mayor Pound!"

"Cat Randolph?" exclaimed Dale Champeau. "Why, Cat was trying to get at the truth of all this! He was trying to get at the truth by pretending to play along with Hooker Suggs and Rama, the dancer!"

The Creole woman cried out and tried to free herself from a sailor's grip.

"Take her below!" commanded The Skipper. "After a while, she shall be set free with her face as it is! I imagine that will be lasting punishment, though it was inflicted inadvertently!"

Peter Doom saw the government cruiser coming hull-up. She was less than five miles away. Evidently, glasses were upon the *Whirlwind* and the kidnaped steamboat.

"By my sacred aunt, Skipper!" said Peter. "This will be a mess!"

"There will be no mess, Peter!" called out Cap. "Spike, have Mayor Samuel Pound, Yall Jutt and Hooker Suggs placed in the dungeons! Place Chief Ulan there, with his crooked policemen! All were working with Samuel Pound! If they were turned over to the law of the land, perhaps some would get the death sentence!"

The Skipper was estimating the distance of the government cruiser.

"So, it will not be as short and sweet as that!" pronounced The Skipper. "These men are of the deep south! Their blood is thin!"

Some grim humor glinted in Cap's eyes.

"So it will be the Arctic for the rest of their lives, and may they live long to appreciate the law twelve miles out! Such law as they never before have witnessed! You will do well on an Arctic island, scraping the rotten hair off hides, Samuel Pound! And you need not turn your eyes toward that cruiser, my friend!"

SUDDENLY, The Skipper was roaring command. The anchor was being weighed. Sailors propelled the prisoners from the deck. The body of Judge Thatcher remained, for the time, hanging at the whipping post. The grappling hooks slipped from the *Mary Belle*.

The crowd shouted, cried out as the big steamboat, her hull riven by fearful speed, slowly started sinking.

But the sea was calm. The government cruiser was now less than a mile away. It would be alongside before the old *Mary Belle* took too much water. All of the Riverton citizens would be saved.

They would be returned to their city freed of the plague of the green death; freed of Samuel Pound, Yall Jutt, Hooker Suggs and the others who had aided in murder and terror. The *Whirlwind* started moving. From the cruiser came white puffing smoke, a cracking explosion.

A shot splashed into the sea across the bow of the old tanker. But the *Whirlwind* gathered speed. The cruiser must pause to pick up the men on the sinking *Mary Belle*.

"By the holies!" said Captain Fury. "It will be a neat game!"

And it was. Shells from the government cruiser crashed across the green Gulf. Some made almost direct hits. But the armor of the *Whirlwind* shed

them as if they had been hailstones. The old tanker was picking up tremendous speed, heading straight toward the Caribbean.

Seeing the condition of the sinking *Mary Belle,* a cursing captain was forced to bring the cruiser around. It would be nearly an hour before all could be taken off the shattered river boat.

The wide, green Gulf showed not even a smudge of smoke when Cap Fury went down to his cabin. He seemed to have a premonition, for he was pulling a little black book from his pocket. And Dale Champeau was then in the arms of the tall Cat Randolph.

"When we can, we will return and find old Mata," Cat Randolph was saying. Then he saw The Skipper. "Sorry, Captain Fury, but I had to play a tough game with some of your men to get your sub out of the swamp and save them from Sugar Cane and his convicts. Now, I was wondering——"

"Sure, I know," grinned The Skipper. "The law twelve miles out permits a ship captain to perform a wedding ceremony. I have the book all ready. But first, tell me what became of the real Champeau diamonds, while you were swindling Hooker Suggs and misleading Rama, the dancer?"

"The diamonds, Captain Fury?" smiled the gray-eyed cat man. "For many days, they have been inside the big ol' alligator in my wild-cat show. But before I went into the swamps the last time, I shipped the alligator as a temporary exhibit to a museum in New Orleans. I never did trace the green plague to Samuel Pound, but I was getting close when you stepped in."

"Stand up and join hands," said The Skipper, solemnly. "Cat Radolph, you are a smart man. Dale Champeau, you are a beautiful woman. May you always be lucky, and happy, and never forget that the law twelve miles out is as fresh and clean as the wind and the sea."

THE END

This is the last issue of *The Skipper* magazine in its present form. Street & Smith, in order to follow the latest policy of putting out bigger and better magazines for the same price, have consolidated *The Skipper* with *Doc Savage,* and in the November issue of *Doc Savage* you will find not only the complete book-length novel of Doc Savage and his pals, but also a new and smashing Skipper story, other short stories, Jujutsu instructions, and other attractive departments and features.

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To Our Readers:

With this issue of The Skipper we are discontinuing the present magazine and combining The Skipper novel and features with another Street & Smith publication—Doc Savage. Doc Savage is the leading mystery-adventure magazine in the field; the only one that has withstood the test of time, and increased in circulation and prestige with each issue.

In combining The Skipper with Doc Savage, we are giving our readers much more for their money. If you liked The Skipper stories, you will enjoy Doc Savage. And by giving you both Doc Savage and The Skipper for the price of one, we will certainly be giving you more for your money!

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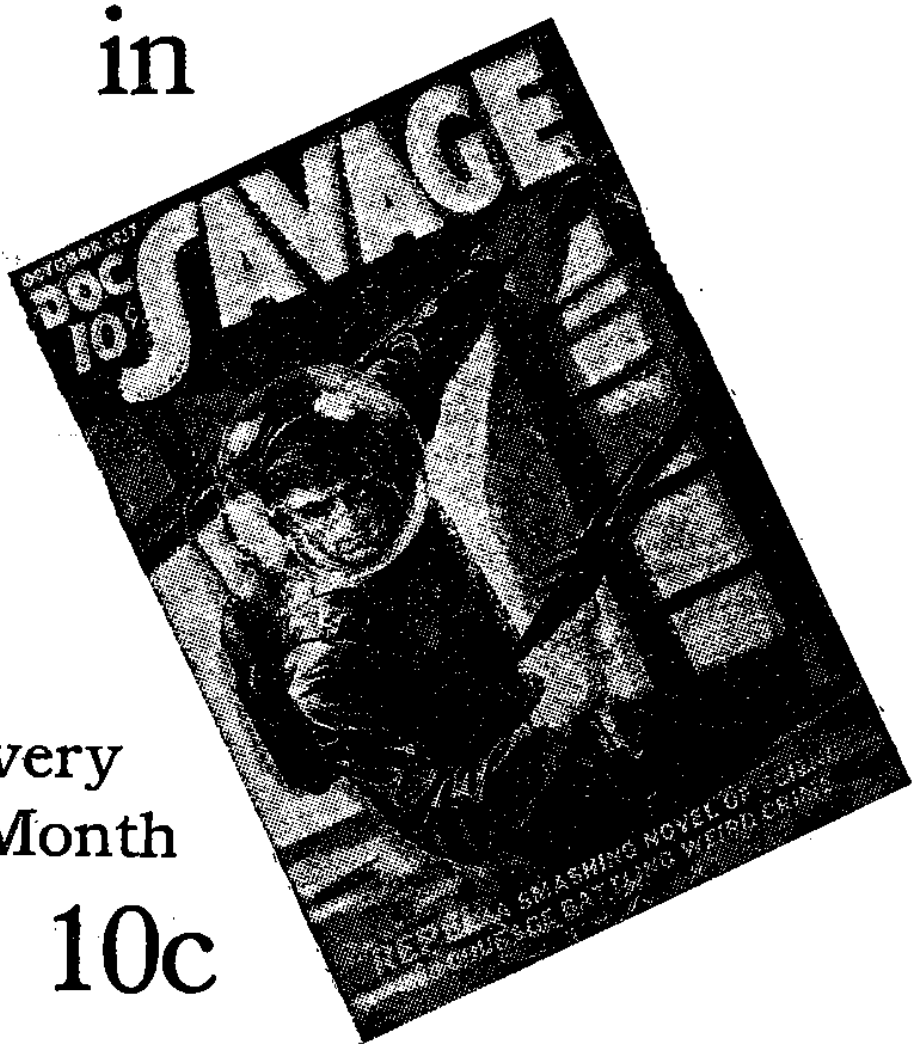

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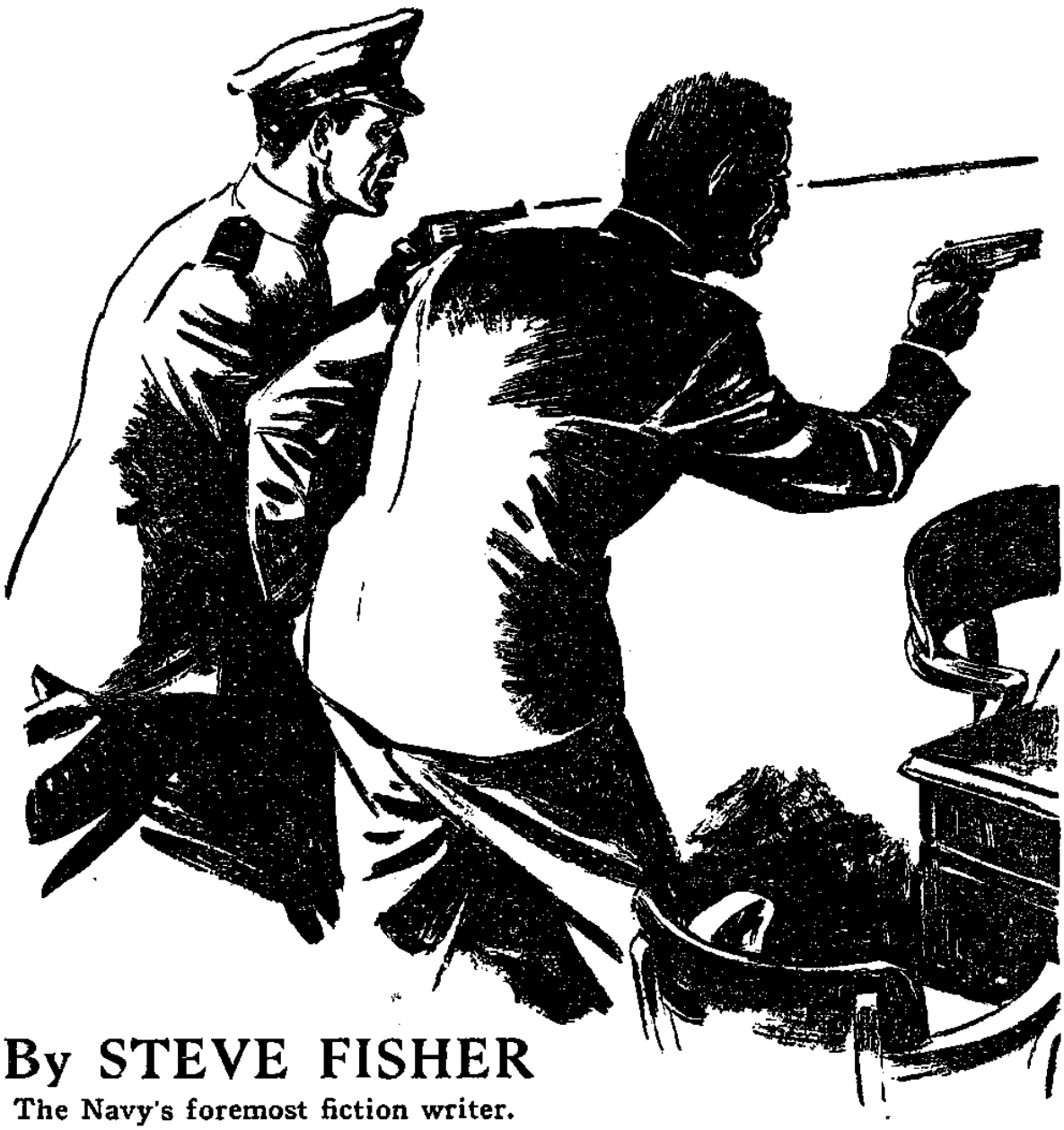
Two words would save those gaunt greyhounds of the U. S. Fleet, and the one man who could give them lay bruised and injured high on the battleship's bridge roof!

CHAPTER I.

THE GHOST SHIPS.

A SINGLE shaft of moonlight threaded through the night pitch of a tropic storm. Rain clattered. Coco palms groaned. And then *they* came, blunt, creaking shadows in the thin line of moonlight.

Seven ancient ships: old freighters, and tankers and tramp vessels they were. One behind another they came,



By STEVE FISHER

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without lights, *without a crew.* Ghost ships marching through the storm, so old that they seemed soggy and cruised deep in the water; so old that the rats had long ago fled from their leaking bilges.

Pitching and tossing, waves breaking across their empty bows, they entered Marrow Straits between two of the islands here off the South American coast. The ship first in line stopped; the other vessels changed their course and, creaking, came around the first. The third ship moved around the second. This movement, slow, deliberate, lasted for one solid hour. When it was completed, the seven ships were abreast, like crooked teeth in a discarded comb. Abreast, they stretched across the three miles of the straits and again moved forward——

THE tall, bald-headed man kept watching through the long glass. He stood in a small room enclosed by rocks on the north shore of the straits. It was the only sign of life on either of the

islands, and he and the man who sat at a radio panel behind him were the only humans on either of the islands. The bald man moved backward, ran his finger along a large chart of the straits. He studied it closely, then approached the long glass again and peered through. Without turning, he said:

"They'll be in position in ten more minutes."

"All right," said the man at the radio. "Damned if I think they'll float *much* longer than that."

The bald man laughed, moving back from the glass. He fumbled with a cigarette, put it in his mouth and lit it. His brown eyes flickered. "They'll hold up all right. How are the controls?"

"All right."

"Is it hard to handle seven ships at once by that kind of radio maneuvering?"

The man at the radio, short, heavy-set, looked up. "Yeah. Sure. Seven times as hard as handling one. So what?"

"Don't let the storm get you, Harry," said the bald man. "It'll be all over pretty soon."

Harry grunted. "What finally happened to Old Man Miller?"

The tall man said: "He's dead. We put him aboard the *Marvin.*"

"The second ship, eh? What if his body floats? Be a give-away."

"It won't float. It's tied up, and inside a closed boiler."

Harry leaned back over the radio, and said: "Too bad about that guy. Maybe we should have paid him for the *Marvin.*"

"Pay? When we have no more use for him?" The bald man dropped his cigarette and stepped on it. Cold laughter dropped from his lips. He turned back to the long glass——

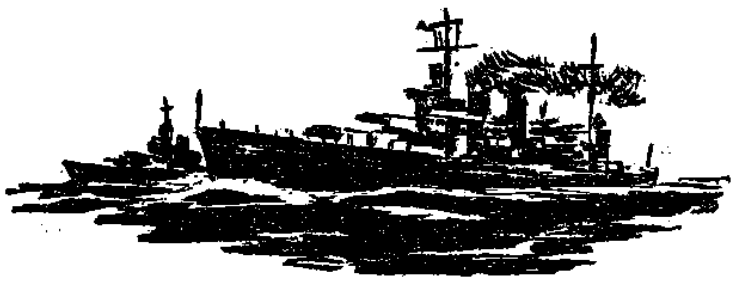
"OLD MAN" MILLER had been able to get the ropes off him and he sat there in the cold, black boiler in pitch darkness now, aware of the fact that the foreign agents who had come around to buy his junked ship, the *Marvin,* were under the impression that he was dead. He thought that he very nearly was. His head throbbed. His body ached. But he had been a sea-going captain for thirty years, and he was a hard man to kill.

He sat in the boiler, listening to the rush of water against the side of the ship, feeling the sway of the vessel, the pitch and roll; hearing the waves crash over topside. It was damp here in the boilers that had once raged with fires that churned the screw of the *Marvin.* It was cold, and damp, so that Miller shivered.

He thought back to the shipping-yard office he had maintained for the past five years; to the first day the agents had come around. He had not then known that they were visiting shipping yards up and down the entire coast to make purchases of similar vessels; and, at first, he did not suspect that there was anything queer in the story they told him: that the ship was being bought for a South American shipper, whose intention it was to remodel it for coastal service.

But later, he grew suspicious because the price they offered was so high, and because there were so many strings attached to getting his hands on the actual cash. He had grown suspicious and cabled the South American shipper, only to find that he did not exist. And then he had gotten in touch with the government.

But he had not known they had long ago tapped his telephone line, and that when he made the call, the wires were cut. He did not know this. When one of their other agents arrived—one he had not seen during previous negotiations—and told him he represented the United States government, Miller had fully believed it.



BECAUSE of this unhappy belief, he had been lured aboard his ship, shot at, slugged, bound with rope and thrown into the boiler. He could well imagine that the necessary sales papers had been forged, and that the foreign agents had told the other men in the shipping yard that the sale was completed.

So for three days he had been here, though he was not sure of this exact time. He judged from how empty his stomach was, and how his mouth thirsted for water, and even in this dampness was so parched that he could scarcely part his lips.

But even so, with these clues, and his past experience, time was an element of which he could not be sure, because he had been conscious for only ten hours.

He sat now as he had been sitting for ten hours, his shoulder braced against the iron door, his ears alert for sound. He knew there was only one chance in a thousand of getting out, and he knew this only because he had been on ships for so long.

It would be absolutely impossible to try and break through the bolt. But in a storm such as this, when the ship pitched and rolled and tossed, sometimes, on rare occasion, the bolt over the door lifted when the ship plunged down exceptionally hard.

He kept listening. *If* he could crash against the iron door at the time the bolt lifted, the door would swing open. A fraction of a second delay would mean that the bolt would drop back into place. Twice now, he had heard a click that told him the bolt was up; but both times, though he had been sitting here and waiting, he had been engrossed in thought, and he had crashed against the iron door a spare split second too late.

Now he concentrated on nothing but that *click*. He waited, breathless and cold, his eyes aching through the pitch darkness, waiting, and listening——

It came, as he knew it must.

HIS shoulder was against the iron door. It burst open so hard that he tumbled out of the boiler and crashed down on the rusty iron deck of the *Marvin's* engine room. He lay there for a moment, sucking breath into his lungs; and then, clutching the boiler that had entombed him, he pulled himself to his feet and looked around. He could see nothing because of the darkness. He listened to the water against the hull. He felt a half inch of water beneath his feet. That meant the bilges were flooded!

Though Miller's knowledge of seamanship told him that it was very likely the ship would not sink for hours yet, an instinct born in a man of the sea warned him that something more drastic than an ordinary sinking was about to take place. He felt pressure and urgency stirring in his soul. His heart was beating hard against his side. He moved forward, swung up the engine-room ladder.

He had climbed one ladder after another and was amidships just below topside, when he came into the room which smelled and felt different than the others. He dug into his pockets for a match, but he had none.

But just then a shaft of moonlight crawled through the dusty porthole and he saw, dimly, that the room was filled with a mechanical machine. Near the machine were stacks of boxes marked with what looked to be a red "X."

"Radio controlled—the tub's going to be blown up!" he whispered thickly.

Sweat stood out on the old man's face now, and he hurriedly climbed the ladder to top side. Water splashed over his shivering body. He barely saw the shore in the distance, and the waving coco palms. Rain beat down across his face. But he knew, thought he knew, that he must waste no time. He plunged over the side.

He choked and floundered in the water. He was lifted on a wave and saw the seven ships abreast. The sight was incredulous at first, but presently nothing mattered except making headway by swimming—and this seemed impossible. Water filled his lungs. He spluttered, gasped for breath. He flayed out his arms. A wave tossed him half out of the sea, and then he dropped back.

"I was a fool," he thought. "A fool for leaving the ship!"

SEVEN creaking, groaning ships they were. Ghost ships, lined abreast and moving slowly through the straits as rain clattered down across their decks. Seven ships empty of men, lifting and falling in the waves; rolling, pitching, moving forward.

And suddenly the sky was ablaze with lights that were hideous: yellow, blue, green, blinding white——

The seven ships, as one, broke in the middle and lifted in an explosion that rocked both of the islands. A minute later, the water was empty. There was no sign of ships. No sign of life—except that of the figure of an unconscious old man that the explosions washed high on the beach of the north island——

CHAPTER II.

DEATH ON THE WIRE.

THE sleek little Filipino servant, who wore bell-bottomed white navy trousers, a mess jacket, and a sailor white hat on the back of his head, had long ago named himself General Isimo. He had named himself while aboard the battleships, on duty as a mess attendant long before he was assigned to work for Lieutenant Peter Case of the Naval Intelligence; and naturally, the name had stuck. General Isimo, admitted "ganteelman's ganteelman," which, in this case, consisted of being cook, valet, gun flunky, and at this moment—cocktail mixer.

He was crowded in the hotel room, but then one did not expect much of Colon; and the tinkle of ice in the mixture of rum gave promise that the drinks would well serve their purpose. He was in the pantry, shaking the drinks. The radio in the next room was playing "There's a Lull in My Life," and Isimo was trying to sing it.

He poured the drinks presently. Just then the phone rang. He hurried into the room, but Peter Case, garbed in immaculate blue trousers and a white dinner jacket, lifted the receiver. He sat back in the bamboo chair. Isimo lingered.

"Look, General," said Case, holding his hand over the mouthpiece, "I've got it. You attend to wet goods. If this is Mitzi, your Panamanian girl-friend, I'll tell her I can't spare you this evening."

"As you weesh, sir," said Isimo sadly. He left the room.

PETER CASE talked into the phone. "Yes?" He leaned forward as he heard a voice come across the wire.

Case was large. He was blond, and had a definitely Nordic face: high cheek bones, hard blue eyes and a thick-lipped mouth. The muscles on his body were smooth, and looked every inch as well trained to physical action as they were. They gave Case an appearance of hardness and strength, yet in spite of this he was handsome.

A hoarse voice cracked over the wire. "This Peter Case? . . . They told

me at the naval office to call you here. My name is Miller, and I've got some information. . . . You'd better hurry. I just escaped death on a sinking ship. Found a passenger plane a couple of spies were using and hid myself in it. Managed that way to get back to Colon. But they're aware I'm here. They're after me. . . . They may be on their way up here to kill me now. And I've got information too valuable to the United States to keep secret. . . . I can't tell you over the phone. . . . I——"

The words had come all at once, staccato, as though Miller were shaking and trembling, talking as fast as he possibly could.

"Where are you?" Case asked.

"Holed up in a hotel room. Don't know how much longer I have before they—they get here. It's on Dove Street. . . . Five twenty. Third floor—top."

Peter Case was on his feet. "Isimo. My gun belt," he said. His voice was tense.

PETER was wearing his white-topped officer's cap and his .45 was strapped around his waist. He was at the door when he became aware that General Isimo, also lugging a heavy gun in a waist holster, was following him.

"Me go, too," said Isimo.

"Better not," Case told him; "trouble's going to start—*plenty!*"

"I not work for you to miss out on anything so fine," General Isimo said. "Either go and catchee trouble too, or maybe quit."

Peter Case grinned, said: "O. K."

After that, they lost no time in getting to 25 Dove Street. It was a dingy street, as narrow as ten feet, and the ramshackle hotel building looked as though it were ready to cave in. Case moved swiftly forward, the .45 gripped in his hand. He climbed the battered steps three at a time. The Filipino boy, puffing and grunting, did his best to keep pace.

They arrived on the second floor. It was bare, and rugless. A black-faced woman stuck her head out of a door and cursed because she had been awakened. Isimo gibbered at her in Filipino, and Case slapped his hand across the boy's mouth to shut him up. He rounded the next staircase and was just starting up when a shrill scream rocked through the old building. It had come from the floor directly above. The husky scream sounded again. Then:

Wham—Wham——

Two resounding shots that shook the walls. The immediate silence following in the wake of the bullets was punctuated by a heavy thud, and a heavy, whispering wheeze.

Peter Case fairly leaped up the stairs; but before he reached the top he saw a tall, bald-headed man standing at the head of the stairs, a submachine gun cradled on his arm. Even as Case saw this, the bald-headed spy was joined by the squat Harry, his partner. In the second man's hand was a smoking .38.

GENERAL ISIMO, three steps behind Case, opened fire at once, missing three solid shots. But Peter's knowledge of handling such a situation differed from that of the Filipino. Except for the first surprise, at which he had paused, he continued his driving motion upward. He continued climbing the stairs, taking no time out for shots.

If he had been surprised, so were the pair of killers. On this he banked: that he could gain the top of the flight of stairs before they recovered from the shock of seeing him and had time to fire the machine gun.

He reckoned inches short of his destination, because he had not reached the men before the horrible, chattering voice of the submachine gun throated its words of lead death:

Brrrrrrt——

The spurt was short, and hideous. Case had leaped, in time, to the right; and Isimo, scrambling after his master, had fallen on his face on the stairs, where he began to slide down. The bullets hummed over his head and ripped a hole in the thin wall beyond. Plaster and wood crashed down across the second floor. The tenants of the hotel opened their doors and screamed, but were not so ill-advised as to let their curiosity bring them into the open.

And now Case, knowing that at such close range a man's hands are better than his weapons, had clutched the barrel of the submachine gun and pressed down on it. The shorter spy moved forward and brought the butt of his gun across Peter's head.

Falling half across the Thompson gun, Case brought his right arm down over it so that the muzzle slipped up under his armpit. With this leverage, his left arm was free. He shook his already bleeding head and slashed out with his own gun at Harry. The spy's nose was half torn off with the velocity of the striking blow. He cursed, backed, and leveled his weapon. The bald man was struggling to pull the machine gun free.

Peter Case saw at once that the situation was hopeless. While he could thus, crouching, hold the machine gun under his armpit and, for the moment at least, render the tall, bald-headed man useless, it was by no means so easy to raise his .45 in his left hand and fire it accurately. His odd position alone caused his hand to tremble, but his finger touched the trigger.

Wham—Wham——

The shots went wild, as he was afraid they would. And now the squat spy, still backing, took a bead on Case and could not miss. The first bullet sang out, screamed its lead in the direction of the Intelligence ace. It caught him through the shoulder. A ribbon of blood followed in the wake of the bullet which, after ripping through his flesh, kept traveling until it was lodged in the rotting woodwork of the hotel wall.

THE shock to his nervous system caused Peter's left arm to go numb, and the .45 dropped out of his hand and thudded to the floor. Furthermore, even though the muzzle of the submachine gun was still under his right armpit, gesticulating motions of the bald-headed spy who was trying to pull the gun away from him, and was beating Case on the back of the neck, threatened to cause him to lose even this hold. Through feverishly strained eyes, he saw that Harry was taking another bead on him, and this time, unmistakably at his head.

Wham!

But the shot had not come from the gun of the squat spy. It had come from behind Peter Case, and he could tell from the squealing that accompanied the bull's-eye shot that General Isimo had fired it. It *was* a bull's-eye, considering that a spot between Harry's close-set eyes was the center of the target at which Isimo had been aiming.

The short spy became a soggy wet bag with arms. He collapsed all at once, arms flung out, legs buckling beneath his dumpy body. He crumpled to the floor like a rag doll that has been thrown down; then, he rolled over and blood ran out of him. But while this was happening, the bald-headed man jerked away, managed to get the submachine gun free of Case, and he brought it up.

Brrrrrrrrrt——

Peter Case was missed because he was not there when the bullets came. He had dived, extending his good right shoulder first; and now he crashed against the bald man's legs, sending him toppling forward, Thompson gun and all, over Case's prone body.

The spy had no sooner hit the floor when he began to struggle. Case pulled himself out from under and came down

with such force on the back of the struggling spy's neck, that he caused the man's head to smack the floor with a blow that might have cracked his skull. The bald man's head was covered with suddenly flowing hot blood, and he lay there limp, consciousness gone.

PETER staggered to his feet, weaponless, and holding his wounded left shoulder. He said hoarsely:

"All right, Isimo, you can come up."

Trembling in every limb, the little brown marksman climbed the steps to the top and surveyed the scene of slaughter with wide eyes. Case moved into a room just beyond the corpse of the squat man. The door had been standing open.

He looked down now and saw another corpse: that of an old sea captain. He guessed at once that it was Miller. Miller, his white hair soaked in blood, his blanched face looking toward the filthy ceiling, was freshly dead. The two shots they had heard from the second floor had finished him.

General Isimo stood at the door and looked. "We come too late," he said. "One minute queecker——"

"Never mind," Case told him, softly.

"Information, she sealed on dead lips," Isimo went on. "Maybe important —maybe life and death."

Peter Case bent over the corpse, while Isimo retreated back into the hall. Case went through the pockets and found nothing; not even identification. He glanced around the bare floor of the little room. In a corner by the window, he noticed scraped marks on the wall. He went over, picked up a small penknife with which the marks had been scratched. He bent closer and read:

Fleet—grave danger—— Will be wrecked in——

There was no more. Case had only to guess the rest, and the possibility of being right on such speculation was a thousand against one. He did not know where Miller had been. He did not know from where he had come. He knew only that he was here; had come here in a cabin plane flown by spies; that he had wanted to tell something he considered gravely important. But, expecting death, he had started to carve the message below the window, when the foreign agents came and did him in. Miller was dead now. The corpse could not talk.

PETER CASE had been in Colon only a few days, and though he had been given tips on several false leads, he had none, actually, on which to go. That is, he had had none until now. Possibly something on the bodies, or in the pockets of the one dead spy and the one unconscious one, would further him along on the investigation which already was too preciously slow in starting.

He left the death room and went back to the hall. His shoulder wound had stopped bleeding, and there was numbness through his arm, but no pain.

Isimo had tied up the bald-headed spy, and now as Peter came out of the room, the Filipino looked up. His brown eyes narrowed.

"Got lead, boss. Catch it from tall guy's wallet. Spy ring for which these two worked has headquarters on battleship. Spies disguised like sailors. They are on U. S. S. *California.*"

"The *California?*" breathed Peter

"May hope to die if not true. Wallet papers say——"

"Hurry!" rapped Peter. "Call the cops to handcuff that bald guy and take him to the hospital. We've got to go places *pronto!*"

CHAPTER III.

"CALIFORNIA," HERE WE COME.

ALTHOUGH Peter Case was now positive that the spy ring which, accord-

ing to Miller, intended "great danger" to the fleet and was operating aboard the flagship *California,* he had no further information; so that he had the whole ship to choose his suspects from. This thought did not please him, though he possessed certain practical knowledge that would narrow the list down some. Obviously, spies would choose one of the navy's flag vessels.*

When he arrived aboard, Case parked General Isimo among his fellow countrymen, then went straight to the captain's cabin. He knocked, and waited for his answer. When it came, he stepped into the room. The captain, a slim man who had thin red-gray hair, turned in his swivel chair.

"Case," said he, "what brings *you* here?"

"I won't bother you, sir," Peter said. "I have work to do."

"There are spies aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, get them off," the captain snorted.

"That, sir, is my intention."

"I should think it would be your intention," the peculiar little captain fumed. "We get under way at three in the morning, you know. War games."

Case said: "I didn't know it was soon."

"You know now."

PETER CASE thought the captain too impatient, and he moved toward the door as if to take his leave. "I came," said he, "because I thought you might be able to help me. We have jobs, we Intelligence men, but we *do* like coöperation."

The captain's eyes shifted nervously. "There's an officer named Brown—communications. Right in where spies might work. I've suspected him vaguely for a long time." He reached up and pressed a bell. "I'll send for him, and you can talk to him yourself."

"Thank you," said Case.

"Quite all right," the captain replied. "Is there anything else?"

Case said: "No, sir," and departed to the corridor to await Lieutenant Brown.

When the young officer came, he saw that he had brown hair and brown eyes, and that he was not unhandsome. He walked with an easy gait, and had a warm, leathery smile. He shook hands with Case. There was a good grip in his handshake.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I can help you?"

"I'm from the Intelligence," Case said bluntly, for he knew that he had no time to lose. He did not know whether he should suspect Brown, but he quickly decided upon a campaign by which he would take the flag officer into his confidence, sound out his suspicions; and whether Brown reported false or true, his answers would make for some kind of a lead for Case.

"Frankly, Brown," he said, "we're looking for spies. Think they mean to make trouble for the fleet."

They walked forward and took the ladder to topside. Peter Case outlined the circumstances and his own suspicions to the officer, and waited for Brown's comment.

"It's funny," said Brown slowly, "but—in my own small way—I, too, have been trying to ferret out whatever espionage ring might be working aboard this ship. I've felt all along things were not going smoothly enough."

Peter had not expected that good a

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* Division, Scouting Fleet, Battle Fleet, et cetera, admirals in charge of a group of ships, choose one of their group on which to ride. When they come aboard, they bring with them their "flag," signifying they are aboard. A captain is in command of a ship. The admiral does not interfere with these duties, he commanding the group as a whole rather than an individual ship. In the event espionage agents are sufficiently suuccessful to "transfer" themselves as officers or sailors aboard naval ships, they naturally try to get on one that carries the flag of an admiral, since this would make it easier to gain possession of orders such as only an important admiral would receive. In this way, the spy, or spies, could intercept messages dealing with such things as future maneuvers in war games, plans for added defense, confidential information regarding new gunnery material, et cetera, that could not be obtained on an ordinary ship carrying a captain as the highest officer.

reply. "True?" he asked. "Then you *are* the right man to see."

But Brown paused.

THEY were on deck now, and Case was impressed with the intense quiet. Stars glittered in a silver blanket across the sky, and so far as his eyes could reach, Peter saw the lights of warships; he saw the yard-arm blinkers, the power searchlights swinging back and forth; he became possessed with that nameless feeling a man gets in a harbor where the fleet is at anchor. The soft tenseness——

Now Brown was talking. "I've done a lot of snooping to see what I could find out. There's a big yeoman named Horton, whom I definitely suspect. With him, a new junior lieutenant named Smith. Who the leader is, I don't know, but I have ideas about a lieutenant-commander named Stohl."

"What have you against these men?"

"Nothing," said Brown. "Nothing really tangible. Of course, I myself am in a position which would be advantageous to a spy, and it occurred to me that it might not be unlikely I would be approached with bribe money to sell out a few government secrets."

"Were you?"

"Yes. By those three I just mentioned. But the attempts were so covered with precaution, in such a subtle manner, that I would gather no proof because of them. I have tried to follow up, and I may get somewhere. But, if they see me with you——"

"I understand," said Case.

"If Horton, Smith, or Stohl are at all really involved in espionage, I will know something *definite* by eight o'clock tonight. I have an appointment with one of them. If I am successful, we will have one or two concrete clues on which to base a case against them. But you will have to leave me completely alone—you understand? If you were around, the whole game might be spoiled."

Peter Case thought that this man was really very honest, or an exceptionally clever spy who was paving the way for a get-away. He turned the situation over in his mind, and decided to give him a chance.

"All right," said he, "see you at eight o'clock, sir."

"Eight—right!" answered Brown.

PETER was a man of his word, even when he was on a case. At eight, he arrived at Lieutenant Brown's stateroom and knocked at the door. There was no answer. He turned the knob and found that the door was locked. He extracted a pass-key from his pocket, opened the door.

Brown was there, garbed in tropic whites, head lying in his arms. A cup that had contained coffee lay on its side, and Peter could see where the coffee had dripped to the floor.

Peter Case lifted Brown's head by the top of his hair and looked into the dead face.

CHAPTER IV.

MURDER TRAP.

"CYANIDE," he breathed, "in the coffee."

He let go of the hair, and Brown's face resounded on the desk. The body slumped deeper in the chair, and the stiff arms flopped out carelessly. Case thought he knew what had happened.

The spies had seen Brown talking to Case. They had realized that both men were on their trail. Peter reconsidered this. If it were true—if Brown was murdered because of this—then perhaps this room was a murder trap! Perhaps they would come in after him—know about the eight o'clock appointment and——

He turned to go, but he changed his mind. Brown said he would have concrete evidence. What was it? *Where* was it? Since the poison had been in the coffee, the killer had perhaps never

entered the room. Even though his life was in danger staying here, Case realized he must try and find whatever Brown had meant for him to have.

He looked around, his eyes scanning the room. He saw a safe. He moved toward it and bent down. It was small, ordinary. He turned the dials slowly, listening for the click of tumblers. Because his training had included a long course on safe-breaking, it was not difficult for him to crack the combination.

In a minute, the little steel door was open. He reached in and brought out several sheafs of paper that were marked "Confidential."

At that moment, he heard the siren of the ship blast out through the night. Three short blasts. The siren was echoed to the next ship. A still more distant echo came from the following one in line. It meant a half hour before the anchors were weighed. The fleet was getting up steam!

PETER CASE took a rag and wiped the poison coffee off the desk. He sat down and mulled through the papers he had taken from the flag lieutenant's safe. One was boldly marked in red ink: "Stolen and returned. Thief unknown."

He was filled with rage. He read the paper marked with red ink. It was a detailed instruction chart—carbon copy —which showed the position of the battle force (consisting of nine of the battleships in this maneuver) firing on long range at moving targets that represented enemy ships.

The nine vessels then fell into line with several cruisers and a division of small destroyers, and steamed full speed ahead through Marrow Straits, which was between two desolate islands off the South American coast. During this retreat maneuver which would put them clear of the "enemy" on which they had just unleashed an attack, they were to sail four abreast, eight of the forty-million-dollar battleships forming the first two columns.

The maneuver orders were clear enough. It was a thrilling chapter of the secret war games maneuvers; but Peter Case could not see where foreign agents, even knowing about this exercise, could profit. He thought they were interested only in giving information to the nation that employed them.

He studied the maneuver order carefully. Then he put it aside and turned to others. These gave the battle orders for each ship in perfect detail. The papers were clean, and these copies at least, he knew, had never been in other than official hands.

Next, he came to messages in code. There was information here worth thousands of dollars to an enemy country. He could readily see why Brown had been killed when he had refused to negotiate with the spy ring.

Then, as he realized this, he became aware again that the murderers intended to come to this room and steal the very papers he was now handling.

AT that moment, the door opened. Peter Case leaped to his feet, clutching for the service automatic in the holster on his hip. He saw a tall, bleak-faced lieutenant-commander.

The man stepped into the room, glanced around, saw the corpse, looked at Case with his gun, grunted.

A dark-haired junior lieutenant came in after the higher officer. Case could see a thickset yeoman waiting in the corridor just outside the door.

Case did not speak. He stood there holding the gun. In his mind, he named the men from Brown's description: Lieutenant-Commander Stohl; Junior-Lieutenant Smith, who was new on board and worked in the flag office; Yeoman Horton, also of the flag office.

But it was Lieutenant-Commander Stohl who most attracted him. The officer's eyes glittered like polished ebony;

his short-clipped hair was almost white, and his eyebrows, the same color, were invisible against the thin white of his countenance.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. His voice was deep, throaty.

"Reverse the question," said Peter.

The dark-haired young junior officer Smith said: "Well—it looks as though we——"

But at that moment, shots burst from the quarter where Peter Case least expected them. Horton, still outside the door, was leaning against it, pumping a small .38. Horton's fleshy face was oozing sweat; his eyes were narrow lines of blue.

The first two bullets went high, but the third took Peter in the shoulder and the awful impact of the slug spun him around and sent him careening against the bulkhead. Somehow, he managed to stiffen himself there; managed to brace his legs beneath him so that it was impossible for him to fall. He pumped his .45.

Wham—Wham——

The .38 twirled in Horton's fingers and dropped. The fat yeoman pounded at his chest like an infuriated ape; and then, all of a sudden, blood spurted out of his mouth, and his face turned purple. Blood ran down his chest. He sank to the deck, dead before he touched, a hideously grotesque corpse. Peter Case had not missed!

THE play had given both Smith and Stohl the opportunity to pull their guns. Peter had time to think this much: the action had been prearranged; the higher-ranking spies forcing Horton to be the goat who drew Case's fire. Slugs smashed around the Naval Intelligence ace now in mad, roaring fury.

Wham—Wham——

Peter Case took another screaming slug through his left side, and after that, all thought and reason left him. He was—he alone—the United States government fighting odds so tremendous that he knew there was no possible way he could win.

And yet, for a moment or two—a moment or two that was all time, that was endless, deathless eternity—he stood there, braced against the bulkhead. He stood there, blond giant of a man, his Nordic face creased with sweat, his thick lips tight, holding a .45 automatic in his hand and pumping the trigger of it.

He stood there even though his open eyes no longer saw the objects in the room before them; even though his mind swirled in and endless abyss and he knew not what he was doing. He stood there, a mechanical defiance to foreign hatred and greed. A symbol who stood between the peace of his country and the hell of war.

A scream filled the room. Shots roared out. A gun dropped from the big, sweaty hand of Lieutenant Peter Case. A smile creased his thick lips. A smile bigger than hell, a smile as deathless as the world. And then blood ran from the corners of his mouth, down his chin, and the blond giant of the Intelligence pitched forward and thudded on the deck with a sickening crunch.

CHAPTER V.

MARROW STRAITS.

THE *California,* leading the long gray fleet of ships, lazed gently through the bright morning sun. And then, suddenly, the clanging of bells of General Quarters sounded. The bells were ceaseless; they went on and on and on.

Sailors leaped from their work and ran to man their guns. Loud-speaker horns throughout the ship echoed the call of a bugle: Officer's Call.

Signalmen stood on the signal bridge wigwagging in semaphore. Radiomen, deep below, sat tensely over their sets. Carpenters dogged down portholes. Seamen hurried below decks to get into

the lower handling rooms of turrets. Officers broke into a trot.

The admiral stood on the bridge and with binoculars, looked at the moving targets on the horizon. The sailors on the range-finder bent over their mechanical instruments. The gunnery officer strode into the armored conning tower that was directly below the bridge. The captain directed the course. And through all this, the bugles kept sounding, the incessant bells kept ringing.

Battle Condition One. Coming on the Range——

Stohl said: "You'd better hurry, Smith. Get up there in that turret. Remember, I'll meet you after the firing and the moment we enter the straits, we go overboard. We'll be able to make one of the islands easy——"

"Think many of the ships will crack up?" the younger spy asked.

"The two columns of battleships at the very least," said Stohl. "That's eight. And eight times forty million is *three hundred and twenty millions'* worth of war defense damage we'll have done the United States at least! To say nothing of those who don't make it ashore, and lose their lives. If we are lucky, some of the cruisers may also pile up. Remember, they'll be coming *full steam ahead!"*

"Will they know what happened?

"No. Not until after they have investigated. And even then, it will be a mystery how the sunken ships blockaded the straits and caused the wrecks. The straits were navigated only a week ago in advance of this movement, and naturally found safe. They were sounded for distance, for depth. They were found perfectly *safe!"*

The agent laughed harshly. "Our blockade will give the American vessels no more than ten feet draft. It'll cripple the United States fleet badly! And that, my dear Smith, is precisely what you and I, and our unfortunate fellows who died on this job, were commissioned to do. Our work will soon be over! But hurry now, Smith. Hurry to your gun!"

THE young man who had managed to get transferred aboard the *California* as a junior-lieutenant, through forged transfer paper and records, rushed to topside and down to No. 3 turret. He climbed up into the pits, already late.

He saw the sailors, stripped to the waist, their backs glistening, working on the gun. He saw the gaping steel breeches that were to take the huge fourteen-inch shells. He saw the powdermen, saw the conveyers treadmill upward. The turret captain stood by the voice tube. A lieutenant supervised the "setters," and with the air of range-finder reports, aided them in getting the range. The pits of the gun were tense. At last, the voice tube rang with a voice that said:

"Check—pitch and roll; coming on the range now—— Fire on the buzzer."

The shells were jammed into the gaping breeches. The breeches slammed shut with a heavy click. A split second passed. The "pointers" and setters were fast on their wheels, their eyes pressed against the sights. The buzzer whispered through the compartment. A voice cracked out:

"Mark!"

The monster fourteen-inch barrels shuddered with explosion; flame fanned back into the pits. The men turned to escape it; then, they were on the gun again. The breeches were being opened. The powder conveyers kept moving upward. Sailors moved to and from them. Pointers worked at their wheels. The voice burst out more orders; and then the breeches were closing.

Buzzzzzzzzz!

"Mark!"

Again the turret lunged forward, vomiting ton shells that spiraled like Herculean discs across the calm blue of the sea. The gun recoiled; the breeches

were being opened. The men worked. Foreign Agent Smith watched all this and——

THE bruised, aching Peter Case lay on the roof of the bridge, the very top of the ship, out of sight from any of the sailors. His legs were bound with rope, and his wrists were handcuffed in front of him. The shuddering of the ship as the fourteen-inch guns exploded rocked him back into consciousness. He opened his eyes to find that he had rolled within an inch of the side of the roof. He looked down at the deck many feet below; saw the yellow fire charging angrily from the gun, and even up here, felt the fan of the flame. He struggled, rolled back to where he would be a little more safe. The ship kept rocking with each broadside.

"So! You wake up now. Me lying here, try hard get off ropes by you."

Peter turned, and blinked. He saw General Isimo. The boy was unwinding ropes from around his legs.

"How did *you* get here?" gasped Peter.

"Catchee hell when I come in on tail end of your battle," said Isimo. "Was following you 'round ship, but come too late. They say—big killers say—they put you up here so you can see damage when she come. Real damage, they say."

Peter Case was silent. Then: "How did *you* get free from those cuffs?"

"Too big for Isimo's gentle wrists," the boy said, grinning. "She—handcuffs—slip right off. Been spending time trying to stop you from rolling off here and get killed. Can get ropes off you, but don't know what we do then. There is no way getting off here. No way at all, boss."

"Anyway," said Peter Case, "I'm glad you're here."

"Glad you glad," chanted General Isimo.

Case stared out over the ocean—saw the fleet. He began trying to understand the plan of the spies; things were becoming more clear.

HE thought he knew why the paper showing the Marrow Straits had been stolen. He tied this up with Miller, who had said he had come from "islands," and that he had been an ex-sea captain. He further searched his memory and remembered back to certain routine reports of old tankers and freighters being bought from local shipping yards by a "South American shipper."

These things he recalled and put together, and because he knew his job, Peter Case was terrified to finally arrive at the ghastly answer: *the straits!*

Isimo was taking the ropes from his legs now, and Peter stared straight ahead of him and saw far in the distance the twin islands and the gape of sea between them. It was not so far as he supposed. He told the boy what he had deducted. Isimo gasped.

"This has been big plan behind everything?"

"Yes," Peter said.

He sat there looking at the ropes Isimo had taken from him, looking at the handcuffs that he could not get from his wrists. It was impossible to try and signal, because he was too far up for any one to see. His brain pounded as he searched frantically for some avenue of escape. He must get down and head off the fleet. He must see the signalmen, the *flag* signalman; he must see the admiral!

"Isimo," he said suddenly, "we've got to try something. It's going to be dangerous. Dangerous as the devil, but it's our only chance."

The boy said: "You know me, boss," and he smiled.

THE guns of the fleet became quiet. The second exercise of the war game

went into effect the moment the crews were discharged from their battle stations. Pennants flew to the yardarm, signaling for full speed ahead.

The battleships fell into formation, four abreast. The first four, gray, sleek, mighty, lifted and fell in the waves, the bows of each in an even line. The second four followed close behind, in the same squad formation.

Four cruisers followed next. Then one battleship in line with three heavy cruisers. Small destroyers, four-stacked, speedy, like gray colts, romped along on the outside of the parade, cutting white froth through the water. The course of each ship was directed between the two islands, straight into Marrow Straits!

Inexorably, the millions of dollars' worth of United States front-line defense moved into the jaws of the hell that waited in the shallow wreck-filled waters ahead. Stacks erupted barrels of black smoke. Water churned around the might screw-wheels of the heavy vessels. Closer, closer, two miles lay between the front four ships now; two miles between them and lasting destruction.

The ships' bells gonged out the time. And time passed. Water swished in small waves around the fo'c's'les of the chips; the sharp bows cut through the calm sea; the ships kept lifting and falling in the water, and moving, moving toward Marrow Straits—— A mile and a half—— A mile and a quarter——

PETER CASE had taken the ropes with which he had been bound and secured one end to the top of the bridge. Now, his hands still cuffed in front of him, he slipped down over the edge of the bridge-top. The rope slipped in his hand. He felt himself going downward. Isimo watched him.

"Easy, boss. Easy——"

The face of the blond Intelligence ace was inscrutably hard; his eyes were half narrowed. Sweat broke out on his skin and oozed through his clothing. The bullet wounds, remaining stopped up by only the hard blood that had caked over them, cracked with this exertion and strain and began again to bleed. Intense pain shot through Case. He felt his heart throbbing.

Blackness moved in and out through his mind. He was sliding down the rope that was not half long enough. His hands were torn raw, and his wrists were already strained from the position in which he was forced to keep them with the handcuffs.

He kept sliding, his hands burning, blood dripping across the rope, blood dripping from his clothing. He was half blinded with pain. This, he thought, was suicide. But he could not fail. He *could not*——

The ships kept moving closer and closer to the straits. Water washed over the decks. The engines, the deep-throbbing turbines were giving everything for speed. Smoke still swirled out of the stacks. One ship after another, in a solid, shining line, sailing toward doom, moving inexorably toward certain death.

Peter felt the rope scraping off the skin of the palm of his hands; he felt the great, terrible ache in his body. He felt a lightness in his head, and yet he fought to retain consciousness. It meant more now than it ever had in any time in his life. He held, and slid, and he wanted to scream with the pain; but he held his lips tight, and his teeth ground together.

He looked grotesque. His shirt was torn and flapping in the wind; his legs were half entwined around the rope. He kept sliding. A small brown-faced boy waited high above him.

General Isimo was up there now, seeing Peter Case; he watched, and as he

watched, great tears rolled down his face.

Closer, always moving closer, the ships cut through the water——

PETER reached the end of the rope, and now he let go with his hands and felt his body plunging downward. He did not know how far he fell. He felt wind whipping about him. He felt the giddy, the horrible sensation of his stomach turning over; then, he heard his own legs crunching on the deck. He thought he heard bones splinter. He shook his head. He still must retain consciousness. He looked around him.

Peter Case whispered orders, and the sailors ran away and left Peter there on the signal deck. Peter dragged himself to the rail and pulled his aching, bleeding body upright. He reached the top of the ladder and looked down to the navigation bridge and saw Stohl.

Peter Case stood there for a moment, and then wild laughter broke from his lips. He was so bruised, so hurt, he no longer cared what happened. He threw himself down the entire flight of the ladder. His body smacked against the standing figure of Stohl and bore it down.

Still, Peter Case was conscious, and his fingers were wrapped about Stohl's neck. He was lifting the man's head and banging it on the deck; he banged it knowing neither sanity nor mercy. He smashed the head until he felt hot blood on his fingers. Until he felt men lifting him off the spy. Until he stood face to face with the admiral. Stood, held up by others.

On the signal wing, sailors were running up pennants on the official flag halyard of the admiral; running up the emergency signal along with the pennants which meant:

"Reverse Full!"

Peter Case lifted his burning eyes and looked squarely at the admiral, and said:

"I was almost late, sir. I'm sorry."

The admiral's eyes were moist. "We were all—every one of us—almost late, Case. You—you've saved the—the fleet."

For a moment, it was very quiet; and Peter could hear the sharp, clear notes of a bugle.

BUBBLING SANDS

make things hot for Bill Wheeler, business scout, until he finds the killer who really should burn!

By HAROLD A. DAVIS

THE shot made no sound. But there was a small, silvered hole in the windshield suddenly. The car swerved sharply as the man behind the wheel ducked, fear tightening the wizened lines of his face. Then the brakes were slapped on; the car shuddered to a halt.

"Night riders! I won't go on," the man gasped.

Bill Wheeler twisted in the seat, his

lean face thoughtful. A gun had appeared in his hand, but it was held slackly. About them, darkness hung thick over a tangled smear of Florida's dense, tropical vegetation. The smell of water plants rose heavily. There was no one in sight, nothing to shoot back at.

"What night riders, Pete?" Bill asked, casually.

Pete Harkins gulped. Clad in overalls, a battered hat on his head, Harkins was short and husky, his skin tough and weather-beaten, but his voice trembled as he replied:

"I—I don't know, exactly. B-but they're plenty bad. Not even the law can get them."

Bill Wheeler said gently, "Let's go on, Pete." Then:

"Those who hide their deeds in the night,
Seldom stay to put up a fight."

Blam!

The sharp crack of a gun sounded clearly this time. It came from near by, the bullet smashing solidly into the side of the car.

The automatic in Bill Wheeler's hand came up, replied three times so swiftly the sound was blurred. There was a lumbering, crashing sound in the underbrush, as some heavy body fled hastily.

"W-we'll be killed," Pete Harkins gasped.

"Go on, Pete," Bill Wheeler answered, softly.

The short man turned with startling suddenness, his face gleaming with almost insane fright. One hand caught Bill Wheeler's gun wrist, twisted it sharply. An arm looped over Wheeler's neck, squeezed hard.

"Sorry," Wheeler muttered—and brought his left up in a short, swift uppercut. Knuckles collided solidly with Pete Harkins's jaw. The stocky man slumped.

Casually, Bill Wheeler returned his automatic to its shoulder holster, slid the bulky man over and got behind the wheel. A faint frown brought wrinkles to his high forehead. He said softly:

"Night riders and shots in the dark;
This trip doesn't seem like a lark."

SOME might have gotten the wrong idea about Bill Wheeler if they had heard him manufacturing bad rime. It might have seemed sissified. Those who knew him realized just how far off that estimate was. Bill Wheeler always thought and fought best when spouting verses of his own composition.

And as he put the ancient car into gear, he was thinking fast.

He wasn't worried because Pete Harkins showed fear at the thought of night riders. Some men were just that way. But it was puzzling that they should pop up at just this time—unless they were operating somewhere in the vicinity.

With the thought, he stepped down harder on the accelerator, pushed the car swiftly over the winding trail. A faint premonition of evil made the hairs rise on the back of his neck.

Professor Kimmel's home should be close. In fact, only Kimmel was supposed to live anywhere near here.

Bill Wheeler's mind flashed to the letter he had in his pocket, the letter from Kimmel that had brought him to this out-of-the-way section of Florda. Kimmel had written:

I've got something you should be interested in. I have found a pit of bubbling sands. It is not quite the Fountain of Youth for which Ponce de Leon searched, but I am sure you will agree with me that it has some of the qualities he sought—even if those qualities are not for humans.

Bubbling sands. That meant nothing. The entire letter sounded like a riddle for that matter. But it had been enough to bring Bill Wheeler to the scene as fast as he could come.

Bill Wheeler was a business scout, a

scout always on the lookout for something to start new industries or revive old ones. It was a job that kept him constantly on the move, constantly alert for a place to invest capital and provide new employment for labor.

"And if Kimmel says he's got something for me, he has, or he wouldn't have written," he reminded himself grimly. "But bubbling sands——"

KIMMEL once had been a famous research scientist. Then he had inherited a small fortune; had retired to this retreat in Florida. No longer young, he divided his time between experiments and hunting.

He wasn't strong. If the night riders were after him——

The road made a sharp bend. Light came from a house, almost hidden by huge trees.

A sigh of relief came from Bill Wheeler's thin lips. That should be Kimmel's house.

Pete Harkins stirred slightly.

"Sorry, Pete," Bill Wheeler began. "I didn't want to do it, but——"

His voice broke off. The car jumped forward while perspiration appeared suddenly on the business scout's lean face.

Other lights had appeared among the trees now, eerie, unreal lights. Lights that seemed to be creeping forward toward that half-hidden house.

For an instant, the cold chill of fear gripped Bill Wheeler's long, lanky body as he saw those faces. For just a moment, he felt an icy blast, felt he was seeing things that could not be.

Then he knew his eyes were telling the truth, that what he saw was really occurring.

The lights in the trees were nearer now. They could be seen clearly.

And those lights were ghastly, grinning faces, horrible spectres in the darkness.

SHOUTS came from Bill Wheeler's lips. He didn't know that. He never realized that he shouted like one of his Yankee forebears, fresh from a clipper ship, when he went into action.

He jammed the brakes home hard and was over the side of the car before it had come fully to a stop.

His gun came out, barked sharply.

Then it was he heard the scream. It was a long, high-pitched scream, a scream of pain and terror.

It came from the house among the trees.

Bill Wheeler had been anxious to fight before. Now he went berserk.

The business scout had heard of the night riders. He had been warned, in fact, even before he had started for Kimmel's home, that a strange, hooded group was active in the Everglades. Why they were active, he had not bothered to ask.

He wasn't interested in night riders. He was interested only in getting new business.

But this was different. The night riders were getting mixed up in his personal affairs, in his business. And that couldn't be permitted.

Gun flaming, he hurled himself into the fray.

Dimly, he was aware that the screams had stopped from inside the house; that tiny, red pencils pointed at him from the darkness, while humming wasps appeared to be moving close by.

There was a faint *pop*. One of the grotesque, grinning heads disappeared.

Bill Wheeler grunted savagely. He had expected that. The heads of fire could only be balloons, covered with phosphorus, designed to frighten the ignorant. The men, whether one or a dozen, were hidden in the darkness.

A huge shape reared from behind a tree. Light glinted faintly on the barrel of a gun.

The business scout squeezed the trig-

ger again. Only a click answered him. The clip of the automatic was empty.

He was plunging forward. He did not pause, even in the face of the weapon that confronted him. He merely lifted his gun, hurled it with all his force into the face of the man in front of him.

The man went down. Bill Wheeler leaped forward.

That was the last he knew for a long time. A heavy object swished faintly in the air behind him. He heard, tried to dodge. But he had no chance.

Without a sound, he fell forward onto his face.

STRANGELY, it was of bubbling sands that Bill Wheeler first thought when consciousness finally returned.

Possibly that was because his own head felt as if it were an aching object filled with a relentless bubbling.

Bubbling sands! Only half revived, still groggy, his mind battled with the problem. What could make bubbling sands valuable? What did Kimmel mean by saying that they had some of the qualities of the mythical Fountain of Youth?

Kimmel. That was it. He had come to see a man named Professor Kimmel. But there had been night riders and screams——

He opened his eyes painfully. He could see nothing. Only pitch darkness surrounded him. And his arms and legs had been tied.

But he was no longer in the open. His fingers touched the texture of a valuable rug. That meant he had been tied and brought inside the house.

With an effort, he shook his head, tried to focus his wavering senses. There was something strange about the darkness, something that seemed to hold menace. He held his breath.

Then he heard it.

Somewhere, not far away, there was something else, something that breathed gustily, as if fighting for air.

Animals sometimes breathed that way, hot on the scent of a kill. There were alligators in the watery reaches close by; there were snakes. There were——

WITH an effort, Bill Wheeler got control of himself. The air was clear. There was no smell such as would have been present had an animal been in the room.

Therefore, the other occupant must be a man. And from the sounds, a man badly injured.

Bill Wheeler had been tied tightly. But the lanky business scout had been in tight spots before. And long ago he had prepared for such emergencies.

With fingers that felt like thumbs, that worked slowly and clumsily, he pulled at the edge of one coat sleeve. The threads had been loosened there.

A moment more, and a safety-razor blade was in his hand; he was sawing painfully at the ropes around his wrists.

It might be Professor Kimmel who was in the room with him, Kimmel in need of immediate aid. He worked as swiftly as he could. And as his fingers worked, the business scout's mind was equally busy.

Something was crazy. That much was certain. Why should night riders want to attack a harmless old man like Kimmel? Of course, sometimes strangers weren't welcome in out-of-the-way places. But Kimmel could hardly be classed as a stranger. He had lived here for years, could almost be considered a native.

And, certainly, hooded reformers could have nothing against Kimmel's habits. Those had always been of the best.

Could it be the night riders were interested because of the bubbling sands, whatever they were?

Bill Wheeler shook his head. That didn't seem logical. It was more likely that they were a bunch of moonshiners,

afraid Kimmel had learned of their activities. But to mistreat and beat up an old man——

With sudden rage, the business scout freed his wrists. He leaped up, felt in his pocket for a match. The light flared.

A man lay sprawled on the rug, not ten feet away. He was bound tightly, and a gag had been thrust into his mouth.

But that man wasn't professor Kimmel. It was Pete Harkins.

FOR a moment, a wave of disappointment swept over the business scout. Then he realized he should be glad he hadn't found Kimmel badly hurt.

And Harkins was uninjured. The gag had caused the strange, labored breathing.

The man's eyes were popping as Wheeler lighted an oil lamp and freed him.

"We—we got to get away," he gasped.

"What happened?" the business scout snapped, shortly.

"You got hit on the head. They nabbed me in the car while I was still too weak to fight."

"And Kimmel?"

"T-they got him."

"Then we'll go after him," the business scout rapped.

Pete Harkins's stocky frame trembled. He opened and closed his mouth weakly.

"T-they said they'd kill us if we did," he half screamed. "I'm just a storekeeper who did you a favor by acting as guide. I—I'm going from here."

Bill Wheeler started to speak, then his thin mouth tightened, eyes narrowing. He moved forward, caught Harkins by the back of the neck and yanked him up. He opened and closed his right fist suggestively.

"What is it all about, Pete?" he asked quietly.

Red surged over the other's features. He wet his lips swiftly, glanced about him fearfully.

"Moonshiners," he breathed.

"Yes?"

"They got a hide-out somewhere near here. They're tryin' to run the old man out, figurin' he was going to squeal. We won't be hurt if he goes. But if we try to go after him, we'll probably all be killed."

Bill Wheeler nodded. That sounded likely enough. But still there was something, somehow, that didn't ring just true.

"Did you ever hear of bubbling sands?" he asked, suddenly.

Pete Harkins nodded without hesitation. "Lots of 'em right around here," he agreed. "Water or springs or somethin' gives 'em that appearance. Don't mean nothing, though."

"You're sure——"

A shrill scream interrupted. Pete Harkins was looking toward a window, his mouth open.

Blam!

Buckshot roared through the windowpanes. Some struck the lamp. The light went out.

Once more Pete Harkins screamed. And even as he yelled, he was in motion. The business scout could hear him almost falling in his haste as he tore for the front door.

Blam!

Again a shotgun spat screaming death. Bill Wheeler reached for his shoulder holster. It was empty. He sighed:

"When guns speak, it's time to go;
And it's wisest not to travel slow."

The front door slammed. Long legs hammering swiftly, Bill Wheeler sped that way. He could hear Pete Harkins racing down the steps as he reached

the door. He smashed through—then froze.

The muzzle of a shotgun had been jammed into his stomach so hard it knocked all the wind from his body.

"Hold on a minute, stranger," a soft voice drawled.

THE lanky business scout tried to get back his breath. His pulse was speeding. The muzzle of a shotgun squarely in the stomach is not a weapon to be dismissed lightly.

And he was sore. He should have realized it was easier for the stalker to run around the house than it was for him to run through it, particularly when he stumbled over things in the dark.

Pete Harkins already was far away and getting farther every instant. There could be no help from that source.

"You want to live, stranger?" the man with the gun asked calmly.

Bill Wheeler swallowed hard. His breath was beginning to come back, and as his wind returned his mind started working again.

He had thought something was screwy before. Now he was certain of it. Nothing added up. Why, if the night riders had only been after Kimmel, had they returned? And why, for that matter, had he and Pete Harkins been tied and left in the house? Why hadn't he been left in the open, where he had been struck down?

The business scout swallowed hard, wet his lips.

"Well," rasped the other, "don't you want to live?"

Strangely, once again Bill Wheeler thought of bubbling sands. There seemed no logical connection yet between the cryptic reference Professor Kimmel had made in his note and the activities of night riders. Unless——

"I suppose all I have to do to live is just go away from here?" he asked quietly.

The other chuckled shortly. "You catch on real fast. We don't want you around here."

"And Professor Kimmel?"

The shotgun was jabbed a little harder, the other's voice harshened. "I'm goin' tuh count three. If you ain't gone by then, I pull the trigger."

Bill Wheeler's shoulders rose and fell resignedly. He said:

I guess what you say is so.
"At any rate, I think I'll go."

"Smart guy," the other jeered. "One—two——"

Bill Wheeler acted!

HIS long arms swept down. One struck the barrel of the shotgun, knocked it aside. The second fist grabbed hold of the barrel and wrenched.

The business scout was taking a chance. He realized that. But he didn't think it was too big a gamble. Two shots had been fired from the shotgun. It was a double-barreled weapon. There should have been no time for the other to reload.

Besides, a suspicion was growing in his brain, a suspicion that sent red waves of anger coursing through him, a suspicion that made him hope he could get his hands on the man behind that gun.

The stranger swore, yanked back on the weapon—and exultation filled Bill Wheeler. He'd been right. The gun was unloaded.

The other man was strong. The first jerk on the gun showed that. Bill Wheeler didn't appear overly powerful. He was tall and skinny. But the muscles along his shoulders and arms were of the deceivingly tough type. And now he was mad. He heaved.

The gun swung from the attacker's grip. Without loss of motion, the business scout whipped it around, clublike, and swung for a blunt head.

The man ducked and ran. The heavy shotgun whistled aimlessly through the air.

Instantly, Bill Wheeler dropped the weapon, plunged forward in pursuit.

The business scout was speediest. The chase might soon have been over. But the fleeing man knew the country, knew the tricks of the tropical wilderness that screened dark, reptile-infested waters. He plunged through vines, raced along a narrow trail too faint to be seen in the darkness.

Then he made a quick turn.

Bill Wheeler tripped as he started to follow. One foot went off the trail into the water. Steel jaws seemed to rear from that water, to lock agonizingly about an ankle as a trap snapped home.

The next moment, and the business scout was thrown into the water, was dragged under, arms flailing vainly.

EVEN as disaster overtook him, Bill Wheeler knew what had occurred. He had stepped into a trap set for some animal. The trap was so rigged that when the trigger was sprung, a weight dragged it under, so it would drown whatever it caught.

Undoubtedly, the man who had led him on this chase had known the whereabouts of the trap. Probably there were many such traps. It had only been a matter of time until Bill stepped into one.

But that thought wasn't going to help him now.

Automatically, he had filled his lungs deeply as he was dragged under the surface, even though he knew it was useless. It was hard enough to set an animal trap, even free. But with the trap fastened to his ankle, and under water, the task was hopeless.

Bill Wheeler knew that, but he didn't admit it. He told himself:

"Even a drowning rat will fight,
And sometimes it wins out all right."

Bill Wheeler was a Yankee. He'd been told that often enough. And he proved it now.

With death only minutes away, one part of his brain still was busy with the problem of the night riders and the bubbling sands. There seemed a possible explanation for the night riders, but the bubbling sands were something he couldn't figure. And he didn't want to die without knowing the answer.

He doubled up, pried frantically at the steel jaws of the trap. They would not budge. It needed something strong, a powerful leverage to loosen those jaws.

Frantically, Bill Wheeler pawed underwater, tried to kick himself to the surface. He couldn't.

His lungs were beginning to feel as if they would burst. His heart was pounding heavily. There was a ringing in his ears.

Coldly, calmly, he forced himself to move slow, to conserve all the oxygen he could. Deliberately, as if there were hours instead of seconds left, he moved himself along the bank.

The chain was not long. He soon reached the end in one direction. He reversed, pulling himself along by clutching the mud bank.

Then his hand touched something—something that he identified instantly. The water was warm, but it felt suddenly to him as if he had been plunged in ice. His brain reeled.

For he knew he had encountered another body—the body of a man held down under the water even as he was held down.

HE almost gave up then, almost let the last gasps of air from his lungs and gulped in water instead. If that other, that sodden, almost shapeless mass he had grasped had failed, how could he succeed?

Then hope flooded his brain, a desperate, frantic hope. There must be steel on the dead man's ankle also, steel with metal flanges that could pry open the jaws of the trap that held him. If he could only hold out long enough to make

use of the chance the dead man was giving him——

With fingers that throbbed and ached, with a terrific, splitting pain through his lungs, he went to work.

Bill Wheeler never liked to remember that episode afterward. It was a nightmare of pain and horror, of bursting lungs and straining heart. He was in the air seconds before he knew he was free.

Minutes later, he was dragging himself along the faint trail that wound through the tropical morass.

Once he stopped, studied a strange sight. Sand, a large area of sand, was bubbling. It rose and fell as if it were water over a hot fire. And that sand was almost dry.

As he went on, his mouth was grim, his eyes flinty and hard. He knew the answers now, knew what the bubbling sands meant, the secret they held that made them resemble a Fountain of Youth in some ways—although not for humans. He knew, too, that he had been right about the night riders; they were not what they seemed.

But there was something that remained to be done. He could not stop until that task was accomplished.

THE hot sun was pouring its heat from the heavens as Bill Wheeler trudged wearily into Pete Harkins's store. His clothes were matted and torn. He was covered with mud. He limped painfully.

Pete Harkins's mouth dropped. "W-what happened?" he gasped.

"Plenty," the business scout said, weakly. He added:

"I'm content just to see the sun,
To be alive and able to run."

Pete Harkins recovered from his stupor. He rushed from behind the counter, assisted Bill Wheeler toward a small office at the rear.

"I knew they'd let you go, provided you didn't try to stay around," he babbled foolishly. He pulled forward a chair. The business scout sank into it.

"But murder was done," Bill Wheeler said.

"M-murder?" Pete Harkins stopped as if he had been shot. "P-Professor K-Kimmel?"

"Kimmel discovered a valuable secret," the business scout explained, slowly. "The secret of the bubbling sand. Some one else learned of that secret—and killed him."

Pete Harkins's eyes narrowed slightly. He raised his eyebrows expressively as a big, heavy-set man eased into the office, shut the door. There was a bruise on the big man's face—a bruise such as a hurled gun might make. Bill Wheeler did not seem to notice.

"Yes?" Harkins prompted.

"As I figure it," Bill Wheeler went on, "the killers made Kimmel sign over his land to them before he was killed. But they couldn't very well file the deed, and then have Kimmel's body found without having to answer embarrassing questions, unless they used a trick. Besides, they knew I was coming; and that I would be suspicious if I found Kimmel had been killed. That's where the night riders came in."

Harkins looked at the big, heavy-set man beside him. The new arrival scowled.

"When you took me to Kimmel's place last night, an attempt was made to scare us off. But it wasn't much of an attempt—it wasn't supposed to be. We were supposed to go on, to see a lot of weird balloons resembling men about the house, to hear a scream. Then, if we had run, we would have sworn that was when Kimmel was killed—two days, say, after he had signed that deed to his land. The deed would have been accepted as legal; no one would have questioned the man who filed it."

HARKINS gasped. The heavy-set man's eyes were narrowing slowly.

"For that reason, we were tied up in the house when I didn't run," Bill Wheeler said, grimly. "We had to be scared off, so we could tell the story we were supposed to tell. Then, if we swore Kimmel must have been alive two days after he signed the deed, the deed wouldn't have seemed the motive for the murder. It would have been taken for granted he signed it of his own free will."

"Yes?" queried Pete Harkins, softly.

"But when I balked, and fell into a trap, they thought I was drowned, and that looked O. K., also. I had gone in just about the same spot where Kimmel's body was hidden. It would have seemed we had been walking together, and had been caught by accident at the same time. For after several weeks in the water, and it might have been that long before our bodies were found, no one could have told that Kimmel had died two days before I did."

"But you found Kimmel's body; you got away?" It was the big man who spoke. His face was hard.

"True." Bill Wheeler's voice changed suddenly. It cracked like a whip. "And I know who had Kimmel killed. Only Pete Harkins here knew I was headed to see the professor. Only Harkins told me there were night riders about; could have arranged that show at Kimmel's house, with your aid; could have framed the whole business——

A gun appeared suddenly in Pete Harkins's hand. And no longer did he look frightened.

"I'm sorry you're right, Bill Wheeler," he snarled. "The old guy would come around bragging of what he'd found, so I did just as you said, then killed him. And now—you are going to die also."

FOR a long moment, there was silence. The heavy-set man was breathing hard. The gun was steady in Pete Harkins's hand; his shoulders were hunched, his teeth bared.

"It was a good set-up," Bill Wheeler agreed at last. "And you were gambling for something that meant a fortune. But you've lost."

"Lost?" Pete Harkins laughed, a chilling, almost silent laugh. "No, not yet. It'll still work. For you're going back to that spot where Kimmel's body is. You'll rejoin him under the water. And this time, you won't get away."

He paused for a moment, glanced at the big man who had helped him. "Rap him over the head, Joe," he snapped.

The burly man lurched forward. Bill Wheeler sighed.

Then the business scout moved. He moved with the speed of light, moved in a flashing leap sideways from his chair.

And as he moved, a gun flicked to his hand.

It was sight of that gun, probably, that slowed Pete Harkins. He didn't know that Kimmel's body already had been taken from its watery grave, or that Bill Wheeler already had talked to the sheriff. He had thought the business scout unarmed. He fired—just an instant too late.

Bill Wheeler's gun spoke first.

The bullet caught Pete Harkins high up in the shoulder. He screamed and spun backward, his gun dropping to the floor. His companion smashed a blackjack toward Bill Wheeler.

Coldly, calmly, Bill Wheeler shot again. As he shot, he was thinking of the dead eyes of the man who had been his friend, of the pitiful figure of Professor Kimmel, and how helpless that figure must have been in the powerful arms of the big man.

The business scout placed his shot squarely between the big man's eyes.

"BUT the bubbling sands?" asked the sheriff sometime later.

"A real Fountain of Youth, but for vegetables, not for humans," smiled Bill Wheeler.

"Vegetables?"

"And fruit. The sand just appeared to bubble. What really is happening is that carbon dioxide is rising under it—pure carbon dioxide gas, odorless, but almost invaluable."

"But—but I don't understand?"

"Dry ice," the business scout said simply. "Dry ice is made from carbon dioxide. And at present there is only one pure, natural source of that gas, and that is in California. Otherwise, it is made by an expensive process from the waste-stack gases of power companies. The real gas often goes unnoticed. Kimmel must have passed that sand by for years before he investigated."

"California! Those western——" began the sheriff.

"Yeah, I know." Bill Wheeler grinned. "But now Florida can have its supply. A supply of perfectly pure carbon dioxide, generated by some ancient vegetation far underground. Carbon dioxide that makes sand bubble; that, converted into dry ice, keeps vegetables and fruit in perfect condition on their long trip to the market. It keeps them young, as if they were in a Fountain of Youth.

"I know Kimmel's heirs. It won't take long to get a plant in operation here."

The sheriff smiled, then frowned fiercely as he turned toward Pete Harkins's cowering figure.

"Harkins will burn," he promised harshly.

Bill Wheeler did not seem to hear. He was thinking. Then the sheriff started. For the business scout had burst into verse. "Yes, he said, "Harkins will burn, for that's what happens when——

"Men who play at night riders,
Act the part of highbinders;
Because bubbling sands come high,
And to steal them is to die."

If you liked this story by Harold A. Davis, you will enjoy the series of stories by the same author which appear in *Doc Savage* Magazine. Many other *Skipper* features will be incorporated with the current features of *Doc Savage*, thus giving you extra value for your money. Don't forget to ask your news dealer for the latest issue of DOC SAVAGE when you next pass his stand.

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By
Carl Jacobi

It was hard to escape

Death On Tin Can

—as these crooks found out!

HARMON awoke abruptly as the clock on the bungalow wall struck twelve. Rigid, he lay motionless on the cot, listening. There was no sound save the wind moaning through the palms and the distant throb of the breakers on the island's lower shore.

He slid to his feet, reached for the automatic under his pillow and moved quietly to the door. Before him, the veranda and the clearing beyond lay silent and empty in the moonlight.

Something was wrong. He knew it, felt it with every nerve of his body.

He opened the screen door, paced barefoot down the gravel path to the edge of the cliff that marked the open end of the clearing. Tall and lean, he stood there, gazing down upon the silvery beach.

No lights showed in the bamboo shack below him. There was only the roar of the surf.

Yet since late afternoon, when the *Fortuna* had steamed away after discharging three passengers on the island, he had been uneasy. The three passengers—Catlett, Wicks and Singleton—had appeared genial enough. But beneath their veneer of pleasantry a sinister undertone had been apparent.

"Are you the resident?" Catlett had asked as he stepped off the jetty. And when Harmon had replied that he was merely the acting assistant in the chief magistrate's absence, the man had smiled blandly and proceeded to explain.

He and his companions were survey men for the South Pacific Cable Co. They had come here to Niuafou to look over the island as a possible site for a relay station for a new cable line to connect Sidney with Samoa and points west. They had a letter from the commissioner-governor in Suva, requesting every courtesy be extended them.

"But this is Tin Can Island," Harmon had objected. "There won't be another ship for six months."

"Don't worry about that," Catlett had replied. "A company boat from Suva will pick us up day after to-morrow."

And an hour later the *Fortuna,* with a farewell blast, had put out to sea.

IN the moonlight now, a grim smile twisted Harmon's lips. Tin Can Island! The name, which had almost superseded the native one, came from an odd array of facts. Six months of the year, during the southwest trades, the monthly inter-island steamer managed to scrape its way through the reefs, into the little lagoon. But during the remaining six months, landing was impossible. The steamer stood off in deep water then, dropped mail in a sealed can, while two natives swam out and pushed it to shore.

With the resident laid up with fever in Apia and with the copra plantation temporarily closed down, Harmon had been the lone white man on the island. The arrival of the three cable men changed everything.

His suspicions had been aroused when, just at sundown, he had seen the trio saunter down to the lagoon and examine his diving gear.

That diving gear, plus the piles of pure white shell and the little dory drawn up on the sand, spoke volumes. It told any one who could read the signs that Harmon had found a paying proposition beneath the blue water of the lagoon. Pearls! For a year he had been working an almost virgin bed.

Suddenly Harmon tensed. A twig snapped loudly somewhere in the wall of undergrowth at his side. He whirled, lifted the revolver.

Twenty feet away a fern frond at the edge of the clearing moved significantly. And in the stillness, stealthy footsteps sounded. Eyes hard, Harmon moved forward cautiously.

He had almost reached the jungle wall when it happened. A rush of feet came from behind, and in a flash he realized he had been tricked.

He spun about to meet a heavy figure charging upon him. The revolver was knocked from his hand. A hard fist thudded into his jaw. Frantically he fought back, brought his long arms into play. He closed in, pumped his fists in and out.

But only for a moment. Something hard and heavy cracked down on his skull. A burst of flame and colored lights swirled in his vision. In a pit of blackness he felt himself falling——

WHEN he opened his eyes he was lying on the cot in his bungalow. The carbide lamp suspended from the ceiling had been lit and, by the table, slumped back in a chair, sat Catlett.

Harmon's head ached savagely. Dried blood had caked on his face. He eased himself up on one shoulder, saw that his wrists and ankles were securely bound.

Catlett slid a cheroot between thin lips and nodded quietly.

"Take it easy, Mr. Harmon," he said.

Harmon glanced across the room at the clock, saw that an hour had passed since he had been knocked out. Bitterness at his lack of caution engulfed him.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"The idea"—Catlett's button eyes glinted with triumph—"is quite simple. Temporarily you are our prisoner. Later, after you agree to a few demands, you will have your freedom."

The man got up, helped himself to a whisky bottle and a glass on a shelf and returned to his chair.

"I suppose you know by now," he said, "that we have nothing to do with a cable company. Our business is pearls, the same as your own."

He poured himself a peg of whisky and sipped it slowly.

"Unfortunately, as you know, most good fisheries have been taken over. They are either government or company-contract restricted. A virgin bed such as you evidently have been working here on Niuafou is difficult to find."

Harmon's fists clenched. "What makes you so sure there is a virgin bed?"

Catlett smiled. "Because, Mr. Harmon, a month or so ago you sent to Pago Pago for a new air hose for your diving suit. Now consider. Why would a man send to the American colonly in Samoa for something it would be quicker and far easier for him to obtain in Suva? Because he is an American and wishes to use home products? Ah, no, I reason. Because he has found something he is anxious others in these waters will know nothing about." He tapped the ash from his cheroot. "You follow me?"

The sardonic suavity of the speech cut into Harmon like a knife. "And what do you plan to do," he said bitterly, "poach?"

For answer, Catlett opened the drawer of the table and took out a small tin box. "Poaching infers leased fisheries. The lagoon here is open to any one who cares to work it.

"We are taking off your hands the pearls you have already gathered," Catletl went on, pointing to the box. "You are selling them to us for fifty dollars. I have the money and a bill of sale. You will sign it, please."

"Fifty dollars!" Harmon cried. "You're crazy! Those pearls are worth at least——"

"I know perfectly well what they are worth. Nevertheless, you are selling them to me at that price."

Catlett got up and advanced to the cot with a paper and a fountain pen.

Deliberately Harmon studied him. Catlett was small, almost feminine in stature. His hands were soft and smooth, with tapering fingers. But in spite of the casual smile, there lurked in those dark eyes a gleam of savage cruelty.

"Are you going to sign?"

"I don't think I will." Harmon's lean face set defiantly.

The little man's smile vanished as his lips quivered with slow-mounting rage. He slid a revolver from his pocket, fingered it lightly, suddenly leveled it at the prone man and fired point-blank.

The shot was deafening in the room. The slug, as it tore through the flesh of Harmon's left arm, sent a stab of agony through his body.

"You will sign, Mr. Harmon," Catlett said, his suavity returning. "If you do not——"

FURTHER resistance was foolhardy. Silently, lips tight with pain, Harmon took the pen and scrawled his name at the bottom of the paper. Then, utterly done in, he fell back. With a nod, Catlett folded the sheet, placed it in his pocket and paced out on the veranda.

A moment later the screen door banged and he returned with his two companions. Wicks was a heavy-set, florid-faced man with a diagonal scar running across his left cheek. Singleton, stiff in carriage, yet loose-mouthed, had all the earmarks of a cashiered British naval officer.

"All set?" Wicks asked.

Catlett nodded. "Everything is ready," he said. "You, Singleton, will leave at once for the native village on the other side of the island. You will recruit as many natives as you can. If they have canoes, see that they bring those.

"Wicks, your job is to take care of our foolish friend here, Mr. Harmon. Wash and bandage his wound and——"

"What for?" Wicks, an ugly grin on his face, strode forward and planted a kick in Harmon's side. "Stick a knife in his gizzard, that's my way."

"I said you will bandage his wound," Catlett snapped. "There will be no murder for the present. Later, if it is necessary, it will be done in a complete and thorough manner."

The voices and the light faded for Harmon after that. He fought to remain conscious until he felt the searing pain as Wicks poured iodine on his arm. Then for a second he slumped back into oblivion.

HE awoke with the late morning sun in his eyes. For an instant he lay there, all the events of the night before vague in his memory like a wild dream. The ropes that had bound him lay on the floor, and the bungalow was empty.

Weakly he stumbled to his feet, groped across the room to the cabinet in the far corner. As he had expected, the two rifles and pistol he kept there were gone. Gone, too, was his hunting knife and even the native spear which had been mounted on the wall.

Harmon swayed, inhaled deeply to force the dizziness from his head. Then he went out and made his way haltingly down the path to the cliff edge.

His eyes blinked as he surveyed the scene below him.

The space in front of the beach shack, which Harmon had told the cable men they could take over during their stay on the island, was ablaze with activity. Fully twenty natives squatted on the sand, opening and casting aside shells. Another group was carrying shell from the edge of the lagoon to the shack. And out on the lagoon he could see Wicks and Singleton in his dory. At intervals a brown head appeared on the water, and a pair of arms emptied a dripping reed basket into the boat.

Harmon's nails dug into his palms. Catlett was putting his plans into action, "raiding" the lagoon. And in doing so he was destroying all Harmon's hopes for the future. Harmon had employed no native help in his diving. He had preferred to dive alone with only Natoa, his houseboy, to handle the pump and lines of his scaphander. In that way he could select shell of mature growth without spoiling the potential value of the bed.

Heavily he turned, went back to the bungalow. In the kitchen he made a breakfast, forced himself to eat. His wounded left arm felt sore and numb, but it was well bandaged, and he did not touch it. The meal over, he changed painfully from pajamas to duck trousers and shirt, and went out once more.

FIVE minutes later he stood before Catlett in front of the beach shack.

The dark man smiled an oily smile. "Been waitin' for you to come around,"

he said. "You start workin' right away."

"Catlett," Harmon said quietly, "you've got the upper hand now. But in a month the regular mail packet will come and——"

Catlett laughed. "I know all about the mail packet," he sneered. "It can't land. It stands off beyond the reefs and waits for a couple of swimmers to take away or bring out the mail. There won't be any outgoing mail.

"Get into that dugout," he snapped. "Take two native divers and see that they bring up plenty of shell. Move, damn you!"

As he moved slowly down the beach, Harmon singled out a brown figure before him, and he received one more shock. Natoa, his houseboy, was among those carrying shell to the shack. Promised rewards no doubt had blinded his sense of loyalty.

For six hours Harmon sat in the blistering dugout while alternate sets of divers went down to bring up shell. The sun was low in the west when Catlett signaled to halt work. On shore he strode up to Harmon, surveyed him sardonically.

"I see you know how to obey orders, Mr. Harmon. From now on you will spend each night in your bungalow as usual. But native guards will be posted to see that you do not leave. We, of course, will take over the resident's house."

Harmon nodded. "How about the resident's pets?" he said.

"His pets?"

"Exactly. The resident has quite a number of them: a yellow-bellied parakeet, a monkey, some pigeons, and a couple of tame flamingos. They have to be fed and——"

Catlett ripped out an oath. "Do you expect me to be nursemaid for a bunch of animals?" Then his eyes narrowed, and his voice quieted abruptly. "They will be fed," he said. "When the steamer comes there must be no suspicion of anything wrong."

THREE hours later Harmon sat on his bungalow veranda, surrounded by night darkness. A native guard squatted on the step just outside the door. Another, he knew, lurked not far from the entrance in the rear.

"Boxed up like a squirrel in a cage," he muttered. "And there'll be six more months of it."

Faintly, on the wind, he could hear loud voices and the discordant jangle of the phonograph in the resident's house. Catlett and his companions evidently had discovered the resident's liquor store and were making the most of it.

Bitterly Harmon sucked his pipe. There didn't seem to see a single way out. Moving under a carefully arranged plan, the three fake cable men had thought of everything.

Harmon pulled the pipe from his lips, sat rigid. He thought a moment, then forced a yawn, got up and went inside. The native guard turned sleepily, leaned back against the step.

In the main room Harmon waited ten minutes by his watch; then he extinguished the lights and threw himself heavily on the cot. The springs squeaked.

But an instant later he had slid soundlessly to his feet and was striding across the dark room to the window on the far wall. Here he drew a knife from his pocket and waited, listening. Only the distant sounds of the surf broke the stillness. Carefully he lifted the knife, began cutting away the mosquito screening.

The job done, he squirmed through, darted across the open space and entered the jungle without being seen.

Moving in a wide circle, he headed through the underbrush toward the house of the resident. Twice, at intervals, he stopped to peer into the thick

gloom behind. But there was no sign of pursuit.

His clothing was torn, and his body was wet with sweat when he finally reached his goal. Emerging from the jungle into the clearing that surrounded the resident's quarters, he stared at the house, ablaze with lights, and considered.

Catlett, in his efficient cunning, had doubtless posted guards here, too. But no one would expect his entering from the fenced-in garden to the rear.

Hugging the wall of growth, he crept around the side of the house, then darted forward to the white picket fence and vaulted over it. Two shadows on stilts leaped to startled life.

"Steady!" Harmon whispered, calling out to the two flamingos. "Steady!"

The aroma of hibiscus filled his nostrils. He edged around the neatly plotted flower beds, closed in on the house. A pigeon cooed softly. Another flapped its wings.

And then suddenly he froze in his tracks. Whirling, he saw a familiar figure before him. An upraised revolver glinted in the half light.

"Mr. Harmon," Catlett said thickly, "you are most unwise. I have warned you not to leave your bungalow." The man had been drinking, yet through the intervening gloom Harmon felt those gimlet eyes boring into him.

"If you persist in making a nuisance of yourself, I shall be forced to hand you over to my companion, Wicks. He has his own idea of handling prisoners. Now, damn you, get out!"

For thirty seconds Harmon poised there on the balls of his feet. One leap, one jump forward, and he could smash that revolver from those womanish hands and——

But the dark man's sibilant voice arrested that thought even as it came.

"I wouldn't try it, Mr. Harmon. If you will turn your head you will see there are two native guards directly behind you, armed with knives."

Harmon let his shoulders sag in defeat. Without a word he strode past Catlett, climbed over the little fence and headed back toward his bungalow.

THE next two days were days of grueling labor. With his revolver always within quick reach, Catlett directed the work from the shade of the beach shack. Systematically the native divers moved across the floor of the lagoon, bringing up shell. And the raiding was bringing results. Pearl after pearl was added to those in the tin box. But with each day the future of the bed was being destroyed.

On the third day, one of Singleton's divers brought something to the surface that opened Catlett's eyes in a wide stare of greed.

"Take a look at this, matey," Singleton said. "The queen of 'em all, says I."

It was a pearl, but what a pearl. The size of a small marble, with a steely-black lustrous sheen—fully fifty pearl grains.

Catlett snatched at the crystal, rolled it back and forth in his palm and pursed his lips in a low whistle.

"Ten thousand dollars or I'll be keelhauled," Singleton said. "Don't forget—we split even."

Catlett nodded. He crossed over to Harmon.

"To-morrow," he said, "you go down in that diving suit of yours. You go down where Singleton found this pearl, and you see if you can bring up more just like it."

THAT night Harmon smoked his pipe and went over the situation in his brain. Yet, try as he would, he always arrived at the same unescapable facts. Legally speaking, as far as the lagoon went, Catlett and the others could not be prevented from fishing. They had a signed bill of sale to substantiate their

claim. Even granting that the authorities could be convinced that half the pearls had been stolen, it was doubtful if they would be much concerned. It took nothing short of a murder to arouse a police official in these waters.

It was late when Harmon finally sat down before the table. He took out two sheets of paper, thought a moment, then began to write. Ten minutes later he was staring down at duplicate copies of the following message:

> If you would be interested in a black pearl large and even more perfect than the one you found this afternoon, come to my bungalow when you can, alone. My only price is a guarantee that my life will be spared when you leave the island.

Smiling grimly, he signed his name to both copies, addressed one to Mr. Wicks, the other to Singleton, Esquire. Then he went out on the veranda and called to the native guard.

"Here," he said, drawing a silver watch from his pocket. "Deliver this to Him-fella-fat, and this to Him-fellah-big-thin. No talk to either, and the watch is yours. Chop chap."

The guard grinned, nodded, and was off like a deer. Harmon lowered himself into a chair.

Wicks arrived first, mildly suspicious, casting furtive glances behind him.

"Well?" he said. "Talk up. What's the story?"

"The story," Harmon replied, "is sweet and simple. Briefly, I know where there's a black pearl that'll make the one you found to-day look like a button shell. In the lagoon. I opened the shell a year ago, but I didn't take it. Preferred to let it grow."

A tension of avarice gripped Wicks. He licked his lips slowly.

"Where in the lagoon?" he demanded.

"That," replied Harmon, "is my secret. And I intend to keep it until I'm assured I won't leave here in a box. I want you to help me. If you tell the others, the deal's off."

"Sure," Wicks said. "You lead me to the pearl and I'll break the guy that touches you."

Harmon nodded. "To-morrow, when I dive," he said, "I'll want Natoa to handle my lines. Meanwhile, please see that the resident's pets are fed and taken care of."

After Wicks had gone, Harmon slumped deeper in his chair. The only item that might mar his plans now was the time element. He prayed that Wicks would return to the resident's house without being seen by Singleton.

A long time passed before Singleton appeared. He came up the veranda steps unsteadily, glared at Harmon and leaned back against the railing.

Without preamble, Harmon told the same story he had told Wicks; offered the same proposition.

Singleton listened in silence. An almost imperceptible gleam entered his eyes as he rubbed his jaw slowly. Then he said:

"You're on. But remember, no tricks —or I'll plug you sure."

Harmon was smiling quietly as he went to bed that night.

NEXT morning he went over the valves of his scaphander, tested the air hose and made ready to dive. He singled out Natoa, ordered him to get into the dory and pushed out into the lagoon.

Flustered at first, aware of his desertion, the native houseboy helped Harmon silently into his diving suit, stood ready to lock the helmet in place.

"Natoa," Harmon said, "I don't know what Catlett has promised you in payment for your work. Much colored cloth, probably, and many knives. But listen to me. I will give you twice everything he promised. Do you understand—twice! Now, when I go down, I want you to continue working the pump no matter how long I stay below."

Natoa nodded. The helmet was fastened on, and Harmon went down in a stream of bubbles. His left arm was still stiff and numb, but Catlett's bullet had inflicted only a flesh wound, and he knew there would be no harm in using it. On the bottom he waited a moment until his body accustomed itself to the great pressure. Then, slowly, his triple-length air line trailing after him, he moved forward toward the west shore of the lagoon.

Through the marine growth he plodded slowly, through schools of tropic fish. The sea floor began to rise, and he knew he had calculated his direction correctly. The floor would continue smooth and unbroken to the sand beach. And if he moved the right distance, between him and the shore shack would be a narrow pinnacle of rock. Above and below, Harmon knew every inch of the lagoon.

Presently the shadow of the rock loomed up in the water before him. He pushed his way around it, mounted higher. The water changed from pea-green to blue.

And then his helmet broke clear into the dazzling sunshine. He bent down, unfastened his shoe weights and dragged himself to the beach.

Clumsily he seized a clamp on the side of the helmet and released it. The helmet free, he worked himself out of the rubber suit. Only the fact that the scaphandler was the one-man variety of new and light construction made possible his removing it alone.

He peered around the rock. Catlett, Wicks and Singleton were all sprawled in the shade of the beach shack across the lagoon, opening shell. Out in the dory, a metallic *clank, clank* sounded as Natoa rhythmically worked the air pump.

Harmon leaped across the beach and into the jungle. He was on a narrow, swampy promontory now, and the going was hard. Yet, once in the underbrush, he threw caution to the winds, sped back toward his bungalow. It seemed an eternity before he reached it.

Inside, he seized paper and pencil and wrote a third note. Folding it, he ran out and raced across the upland trail to the deserted house of the resident.

Once again he climbed the picket fence and entered the garden. Once again he poked his way through the flower beds, while the two flamingos gazed at him disdainfully, and the pigeons flapped their wings and cooed.

LESS than thirty minutes elapsed before Harmon returned to the rock on the shore. The three white men were still unaware of his absence. He gave a low whistle, and the native houseboy rowed quickly to the beach. With Natoa's aid, Harmon raced into his scaphander.

He had the rubber suit on and was reaching for the copper helmet when a shout went up across the lagoon.

"Game's up," Harmon said quietly. "We've been missed!"

A moment later the three men came striding down the sand. Rounding the rock slam, Catlett stopped short.

"What are you doing here?" he snarled. "You are supposed to be diving."

"I took a walk down below," Harmon jeered, "and I guess I got lost."

Catlett's gimlet eyes narrowed with suspicion as, glancing at the dory, he saw it contained no shell.

"Get to work," he snapped. "And when you land, land across the lagoon, where we can see you."

"O. K." Harmon motioned to Natoa and climbed back into the dory.

FOR the rest of the day Harmon worked perfunctorily. When, at sundown, he headed for shore, his lips were set tight in anticipation of what was to come.

Even as the dory grated on the beach,

Wicks grasped the painter and whispered:

"Get it?"

Harmon nodded. "At my bungalow in ten minutes," he said. He climbed out of the boat and headed up the cliff.

In the house he drank a cup of coffee, munched some tinned meat, then went out on the veranda and proceeded to wait.

Wicks came up the steps, ripped open the screen door and thrust out one beefy hand.

"Hand it across," he snapped.

Slowly Harmon lit his pipe. "I'm sorry," he said. "Your partner in crime beat you to the post."

"My partner—— You mean Catlett?"

"I mean Singleton," Harmon lied glibly. "My native talked, and he got the pearl. He was here only a moment ago."

For a long moment Wicks stood there, face revealing a slow change of emotions. Fists clenched, he took a step forward.

"Why, you yellow-bellied——"

Harmon crossed his legs. "Don't say it," he advised. "If you want that pearl, I suggest you see Singleton. Maybe he'll sell it to you."

With a snarl, Wicks turned, kicked open the screen door and rushed away into the darkness.

"Number One," Harmon muttered to himself. "I wonder if Number Two will get there before——" He shook his head. That was too much to expect.

But Number Two, in the person of Singleton, did come. He entered the veranda and asked point-blank for the pearl.

Harmon feigned a look of resignation.

"Catlett's got it," he said. "He took it from me at the point of a gun."

Singleton received this news as though he had almost expected it. His reaction, however, came to Harmon as a complete surprise.

"Listen," he said, "I don't like this bird, Catlett, any more than you do. He's too damned bossy. Suppose you and I team together and work things out on our own."

For a long moment Harmon pretended to consider this. "What's your proposition?" he asked at length.

"Simply this: you and I sneak into the resident's house. We tell Catlett and Wicks who's boss, get the pearl, and then work the lagoon here on our lonesome. Afterward we split fifty-fifty."

Harmon rose from his chair slowly. "It's a go," he said.

THE two men went out the door and headed across the upland trail. As Harmon strode along, his lips pressed tight. He knew well enough Singleton could not be trusted. He knew the man would stop at nothing to attain his end, and that very shortly the situation he had prepared would come to a head.

What Harmon didn't know was that he had ignited a powder box with a triple fuse.

A single light was burning in the resident's house when they reached the clearing.

"You stay here," Singleton said. "I'll go in first."

Fists clenched, Harmon watched Singleton move onto the veranda and disappear into the house. The door banged, and there was silence for a long moment. Abruptly loud voices sounded. An instant later, stabbing the stillness, came the roar of a revolver shot.

With a lurch, Harmon broke into a run, raced up the steps. On the sill of the inner door, he stood staring, galvanized by what he saw.

At the far side of the room Singleton stood, feet braced wide, Catlett's revolver in his hand. Before him sat Wicks and Catlett. A trickle of blood was running down Catlett's forehead.

"Hand it across," Singleton said. "I

know you've got it, and I mean to have it."

"He's lying!" Wicks shouted. "He has the pearl himself, and he's trying to make us believe he hasn't."

Catlett took out a handkerchief, wiped the blood from his face.

"Put down that gun, you fool!" he grated. "I don't know what you're talking about."

And then, without warning, Catlett acted. He dropped the handkerchief, bent down as if to pick it up, and hurled himself forward. His outflung arms coiled around Singleton's legs. With a jerk of his right hand he seized the pistol, brought the butt down on Singleton's head. Quick as a spider he kicked the unconscious man aside and leaped erect, swiveling the gun to aim before him.

"You!" he snarled at Harmon. "You did this! You——"

Wicks rose slowly to his feet. His piglike eyes bored into Catlett. "Maybe you *have* got the pearl," he said. "Maybe Singleton told the truth. You damned little pussyfoot!"

"Stand back!" Catlett cried. "If you move an inch I'll drill you!"

But Wicks kicked back his chair and began to move forward. Two steps he advanced toward the bore of the revolver.

"Back!" Catlett screamed. He retreated a step, then suddenly fired.

There was a roar, a blinding flash and a scream of pain. Like a poled ox, Wicks threw up his hands and crashed headlong.

AS the gun roared, Harmon came out of his trance. There were no odds now. It was himself against Catlett. He lunged forward.

Halfway across the room the dark man's gun thundered again, and Harmon felt the slug rip into the calf of his leg. Unmindful of the searing pain, he closed in, slammed his right fist outward.

A third time Catlett fired. The flame blazed into Harmon's face, but the bullet went wild. Then they were down, rolling over and over on the floor.

Small though he was, there was a tiger's strength in Catlett's arms as he clawed for Harmon's throat. A lashed-up knee jammed brutally into Harmon's stomach, sent a wave of nausea surging through him. They traded blow for blow.

And then, eellike, the dark man suddenly writhed sidewise, streaked his hand under his shirt and brought forth a long-bladed knife. He snapped his hand upward and rushed in.

But Harmon had fought knives before. He ducked to the split second, and with every ounce of strength he possessed, catapulted his right fist upward.

The fist met jaw like a mallet. Breath hissed from Catlett's lips. With a moan he staggered and dropped unconscious.

IT was the morning of the next day, and Harmon sat on the veranda of the resident's house, quietly smoking his pipe. In the chair opposite, arms and legs bound, Catlett glowered and mouthed a steady stream of profanity. Beyond, on the cot, Singleton lay, conscious, but still too weak to move.

"You can crow now," Catlett snarled. "But it won't be for long. We'll be here six months; don't forget that. When the steamer comes, I'll swear *you* killed Wicks and——"

Harmon moved to the railing and peered down the upland trail.

"You're wrong, Catlett," he said. "If you'll look, you'll see we have visitors already."

Five minutes later, six uniformed seamen led by a young British officer in immaculate whites entered the veranda.

The officer glanced about him and saluted stiffly.

"You're report was received, sir," he said. "I hope we came in time."

Harmon shook hands and smiled quietly.

"In time," he said. "But no doubt your arrival puzzles Catlett, here. You see, Catlett, Niuafou is Tin Can Island, all right, cut off six months of the year. But there are other means of communication. Those pets of the resident's you were kind enough to feed—a yellow-bellied parakeet, two flamingos, some pigeons——

"Only the pigeons were important, Catlett. Carrier pigeons. The resident keeps them here for just such an emergency. I had only to get into the garden, dispatch a pigeon back to its home in Apia, where the message was wirelessed to the *Queensland*. The *Queensland*, in case you don't know, is the district's British patrol boat."

"But——" Catlett's jaw was slowly sagging.

"How did the patrol boat land? It didn't, Catlett. Natoa, my houseboy, took care of that. He arranged with those natives left in the village on the other side of the island to meet the boat with outrigger canoes.

"You're under arrest for the murder of Singleton. And—oh, yes, one thing more, Catlett. My pearls, please, if you don't mind!"

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GUARDSMEN OF THE SEA

The Work of the United States Coast Guard is Exciting—and Important

ONE of the most inportant divisions of the U. S. military forces, operating under the Treasury Department in time of peace, and as part of the Navy in time of war, is the U. S. Coast Guard. Since 1790, it has probably been one of the most active and useful of government departments.

Few persons realize the many duties of these hardy, well-trained guardsmen of the sea. Duties are exacting; only strong and alert men who love the sea can stand the rigors of this strenuous outdoor life. But it is a service in which few men ever quit! It is a unit of which all members are extremely proud. For the Coast Guard, whether in peace or in war, has always been first on the job in the saving of human life and in the protection of those who must travel upon the high seas.

Its original duties were to enforce the customs laws and to prevent smugglers from reaching our shores. Since that early, original assignment, many new ones have been added; but it is this basic duty that still draws active men into a service of strenuous, oftentimes dangerous work. Many brave guardsmen have been killed while engaging in battles with smugglers, rumrunners and others who would cheat the government out of rightful duty impost owed to it.

During Prohibition, of course, seamen in the Coast Guard Service probably saw more active and thrilling adventures than at any other time, outside of a war. Daily, thousands of dollars' worth of contraband liquors were confiscated during this period. Naturally, plenty of smuggler boats slipped past and landed their illegal cargoes; but many more ran up against sturdy Coast Guard cutters and came to grief.

In stormy weather and in calm, driving their way through treacherous reefs and dangerous waters, in order to reach their quarry, these brave guardsmen relentlessly sought those who would evade the law. Running gun fights, hand-to-hand encounters with crooks who would shoot before they would be captured, was often an everyday occurrence. The type of criminal who was attracted to the smuggling trade was ruthless, treacherous. Many of them were quick-thinking. They saw opportunities for making a lot of money in a hurry, and always such a situation appeals to some men who would otherwise be successful business men, were they to follow a different path.

No wonder the Coast Guardsmen had to be up on their toes; alert, fearless, trained seamen. Tricks used by the smugglers were many, and varied. It took smarter tricks by the Coast Guardsmen in order to outwit them! And they did.

BUT bravery was only one requisite. A knowledge of the sea, of navigation, of military science, of governmental laws and shipping regulations, were merely a few of the required subjects which these seamen must know. As the Coast Guard Service has grown in its scope, many more duties have been thrust upon it, thus necessitating the knowledge of many and varied subjects. It is not an easy service to enter.

Naturally, able-bodied seamen were, and still are attracted to this outstanding government service. But a mere knowledge of the sea is not enough. All applicants for this service are now required to pass rigid examinations before they can even enter the Coast Guard Academy, located at New London, Connecticut. Then follows a four-year course that covers engineering, mathematics, military science, navigation and many other subjects. Cruises to foreign ports are even included in the four-year course, and when the cadets are finally graduated they are alert, keen-eyed men who are able to hold their own with the best of seamen.

Another exciting and dangerous duty of these hardy guardsmen is the helping of those in distress at sea. An S O S crackles over the air on a dark, stormy night. Immediately, Coast Guard cutters located in the vicinity of those in trouble are dispatched to the scene. Perhaps a treacherous sea is running; mountainous waves, chilling cold and darkness are perhaps just a few of the obstacles to be overcome while helpless individuals are rescued from a sinking ship. And the Coast Guardssmen hop to that job with a willingness and a helplessness that is legend.

Many are the stories of the heroic rescue jobs they have completed. Burning ships, sinking ships, persons lost in small craft at sea, a small schooner rammed into an iceberg; these and other incidents happen often in the life of a guardsman. But even with all this, we have hardly scratched the surface of some of the things these trained seamen handle in the course of a year.

DURING the recent flood disasters on the Ohio River, Coast Guardsmen were dispatched to the scene with all haste. Huge lifeboats, capable of handling many persons in a single load, were shipped on flat cars to key towns and the guardsmen followed along with them.

While flood waters raged and helpless mothers and children in marooned, flimsy dwellings waited in terror for aid to reach them, trained Coast Guardsmen jumped to the job of reaching as many fear-filled persons as quickly as possible. It is reported that they did a magnificent job of rescue work during this trying period.

But even that was just another "job" in the lives of these men. Each year, out of the port of Boston, sail more guardsmen on the quest of drifting icebergs. These mountains of floating ice have always been a menace to transatlantic ship lanes. It is the job of the Coast Guardsmen to locate these icebergs and to immediately warn ships at sea of their presence and exact locations. If possible, the icebergs are dynamited and broken up. Guardsmen leave the patrol cutter in small boats, row to the iceberg itself and plant charges of dynamite. These are set with a time fuse, and careful calculations are made so that the charge will not explode until the men have had time to regain their ship. Again, as in many other branches of this service, it is a dangerous—and exciting job.

In far-off Alaska, the Coast Guard Service has other sea duties to perform. Not many years ago the salmon-fishing and the seal-hunting industries were run rather haphazardly. Salmon and seals were killed off recklessly, with no thought given to re-stocking of the wa-

ters for future supply. It was the Coast Guard Service that set up regulations for the catching of fish and seals along the Alaska coast, and to them goes the credit of establishing a system whereby there will always be an endless supply of these things.

Even in that service, where one would imagine there would only be routine work, there was again danger and hardships. Rival fleets of fishermen often got into gun fights and encounters with each other; along the rocky coasts of Alaska ships were wrecked and trouble brewed. But fast-thinking, experienced guardsmen kept on the job and finally straightened the situation out—as they always do.

PERHAPS a man is taken ill on a small ship at sea. He needs an operation as quickly as possible. A frantic radio call is sent out over the air waves, and soon a Coast Guard cutter is rushing to the scene.

Letters have been delivered to persons on isolated islands and atolls. Emergency drugs and medicine have been speeded to stricken, out-of-the-way areas. Along the coast of Florida, when a hurricane is reported to be sweeping down upon the inhabitants of coastal towns and the small keys, it is again the guardsmen who jump to the job of being modern Paul Reveres of the sea. They spread the warning that a storm is on the way. They help the helpless prepare for it. They stand by and aid those who are too slow to get out of the hurricane's path. They have often acted as doctors, nurses, judges and settlers of disputes. Yes, and officers have even acted as ministers in times of necessity!

Seamen at heart, but trained in many other lines of helpful service, our men of the Coast Guard Service are individuals of whom the government is proud. It has often been illustrated that these courageous men are not afraid to "go down to the sea" in ships.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of The Skipper, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1937.

State of New York, County of New York (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared H. W. Ralston, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of The Skipper, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, John Nanovic, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation owned through stock holdings by the Estate of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; the Estate of George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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H. W. RALSTON, Vice President,
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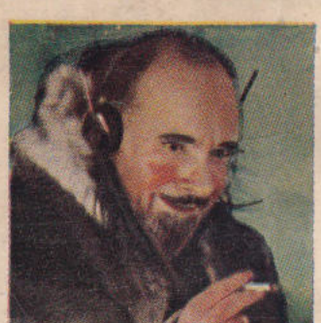

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